PENULTIMATE WORDS

SHESTOV

See Gall p. 13 p. 56

PENULTIMATE WORDS

AND OTHER ESSAYS

PENULTIMATE WORDS

AND OTHER ESSAYS

BY

LEON SHESTOV

BOSTON
JOHN W. LUCE AND CO.
1916

Printed by T. and A. Constable, Edinburgh, Scotland

CONTENTS

	PAGE
ANTON TCHEKHOV (CREATION FROM THE VOID) .	3
THE GIFT OF PROPHECY	63
PENULTIMATE WORDS	85
THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE . . .	149

INTRODUCTION

It is not to be denied that Russian thought is chiefly manifested in the great Russian novelists. Tolstoi, Dostoevsky, and Tchekhov made explicit in their works conceptions of the world which yield nothing in definiteness to the philosophic schemes of the great dogmatists of old, and perhaps may be regarded as even superior to them in that by their nature they emphasise a relation of which the professional philosopher is too often careless—the intimate connection between philosophy and life. They attacked fearlessly and with a high devotion of which we English readers are slowly becoming sensible the fundamental problem of all philosophy worthy the name. They were preoccupied with the answer to the question: Is life worth living? And the great assumption which they made, at least in the beginning of the quest, was that to live life must mean to live it wholly. To live was not to pass by life on the other side, not suppress the deep or even the dark passions of body or soul, not to lull by

some lying and narcotic phrase the urgent questions of the mind, not to deny life. To them life was the sum of all human potentialities. They accepted them all, loved them all, and strove to find a place for them all in a pattern in which none should be distorted. They failed, but not one of them fainted by the way, and there was not one of them but with his latest breath bravely held to his belief that there was a way and that the way might be found. Tolstoi went out alone to die, yet more manifestly than he had lived, a seeker after the secret; death overtook Dostoevsky in his supreme attempt to wrest a hope for mankind out of the abyss of the imagined future; and Tchekhov died when his most delicate fingers had been finally eager in lighting *The Cherry Orchard* with the tremulous glint of laughing tears, which may perhaps be the ultimate secret of the process which leaves us all bewildered and full of pity and wonder.

There were great men and great philosophers. It may be that this cruelly conscious world will henceforward recognise no man as great unless he has greatly sought: for to seek and not to think is the essence of philosophy. To have greatly sought, I say, should be the measure of man's greatness in the strange world

of which there will be only a tense, sorrowful, disillusioned remnant when this grim ordeal is over. It should be so: and we, who are, according to our strength, faithful to humanity, must also strive according to our strength to make it so. We are not, and we shall not be, great men: but we have the elements of greatness. We have an impulse to honesty, to think honestly, to see honestly, and to speak the truth to ourselves in the lonely hours. It is only an impulse, which, in these barren, bitter years, so quickly withers and dies. It is almost that we dare not be honest now. Our hearts are dead: we cannot wake the old wounds again. And yet if anything of this generation that suffered is to remain, if we are to hand any spark of the fire which once burned so brightly, if we are to be human still, then we must still be honest at whatever cost. We—and I speak of that generation which was hardly man when the war burst upon it, which was ardent and generous and dreamed dreams of devotion to an ideal of art or love or life—are maimed and broken for ever. Let us not deceive ourselves. The dead voices will never be silent in our ears to remind us of that which we once were, and that which we have lost. We shall die as we shall live, lonely and haunted

by memories that will grow stranger, more beautiful, more terrible, and more tormenting as the years go on, and at the last we shall not know which was the dream—the years of plenty or the barren years that descended like a storm in the night and swept our youth away.

Yet something remains. Not those lying things that they who cannot feel how icy cold is sudden and senseless death to all-daring youth, din in our ears. We shall not be inspired by the memory of heroism. We shall be shattered by the thought of splendid and wonderful lives that were vilely cast away. What remains is that we should be honest as we shall be pitiful. We shall never again be drunk with hope: let us never be blind with fear. There can be in the lap of destiny now no worse thing which may befall us. We can afford to be honest now.

We can afford to be honest: but we need to learn how, or to increase our knowledge. The Russian writers will help us in this; and not the great Russians only, but the lesser also. For a century of bitter necessity has taught that nation that the spirit is mightier than the flesh, until those eager qualities of soul that a century of social ease has almost killed in us are in them well-nigh an instinct.

Let us look among ourselves if we can find a Wordsworth, a Shelley, a Coleridge, or a Byron to lift this struggle to the stars as they did the French Revolution. There is none. It will be said: 'But that was a great fight for freedom. Humanity itself marched forward with the Revolutionary armies.' But if the future of mankind is not in issue now, if we are fighting for the victory of no precious and passionate idea, why is no voice of true poetry uplifted in protest? There is no third way. Either this is the greatest struggle for right, or the greatest crime, that has ever been. The unmistakable voice of poetry should be certain either in protest or enthusiasm: it is silent or it is trivial. And the cause must be that the keen edge of the soul of those century-old poets which cut through false patriotism so surely is in us dulled and blunted. We must learn honesty again: not the laborious and meagre honesty of those who weigh advantage against advantage in the ledger of their minds, but the honesty that cries aloud in instant and passionate anger against the lie and the half-truth, and by an instinct knows the authentic thrill of contact with the living human soul.

The Russians, and not least the lesser Russians, may teach us this thing once more.

Among these lesser, Leon Shestov holds an honourable place. He is hardly what we should call a philosopher, hardly again what we would understand by an essayist. The Russians, great and small alike, are hardly ever what we understand by the terms which we victims of tradition apply to them. In a hundred years they have accomplished an evolution which has with us slowly unrolled in a thousand. The very foundations of their achievement are new and laid within the memory of man. Where we have sharply divided art from art, and from science and philosophy, and given to each a name, the Russians have still the sense of a living connection between all the great activities of the human soul. From us this connection is too often concealed by the tyranny of names. We have come to believe, or at least it costs us great pains not to believe, that the name is a particular reality, which to confuse with another name is a crime. Whereas in truth the energies of the human soul are not divided from each other by any such impassable barriers: they flow into each other indistinguishably, modify, control, support, and decide each other. In their large unity they are real; isolated, they seem to be poised uneasily between the real and the unreal, and become

deceptive, barren half-truths. Plato, who first discovered the miraculous hierarchy of names, though he was sometimes drunk with the new wine of his discovery, never forgot that the unity of the human soul was the final outcome of its diversity; and those who read aright his most perfect of all books—*The Republic*—know that it is a parable which foreshadows the complete harmony of all the soul's activities.

Not the least of Shestov's merits is that he is alive to this truth in its twofold working. He is aware of himself as a soul seeking an answer to its own question; and he is aware of other souls on the same quest. As in his own case he knows that he has in him something truer than names and divisions and authorities, which will live in spite of them, so towards others he remembers that all that they wrote or thought or said is precious and permanent in so far as it is the manifestation of the undivided soul seeking an answer to its question. To know a man's work for this, to have divined the direct relation between his utterance and his living soul, is criticism: to make that relation between one's own soul and one's speech direct and true is creation. In essence they are the same: creation is a man's lonely attempt to

fix an intimacy with his own strange and secret soul, criticism is the satisfaction of the impulse of loneliness to find friends and secret sharers among the souls that are or have been. As creation drives a man to the knowledge of his own intolerable secrets, so it drives him to find others with whom he may whisper of the things which he has found. Other criticism than this is, in the final issue, only the criminal and mad desire to enforce material order in a realm where all is spiritual and vague and true. It is only the jealous protest of the small soul against the great, of the slave against the free.

Against this smallness and jealousy Shestov has set his face. To have done so does not make him a great writer; but it does make him a real one. He is honest and he is not deceived. But honesty, unless a man is big enough to bear it, and often even when he is big enough to bear it, may make him afraid. Where angels fear to tread, fools rush in: but though the folly of the fool is condemned, some one must enter, lest a rich kingdom be lost to the human spirit. Perhaps Shestov will seem at times too fearful. Then we must remember that Shestov is Russian in another sense than that I have tried to make explicit

above. He is a citizen of a country where the human spirit has at all times been so highly prized that the name of thinker has been a key to unlock not merely the mind but the heart also. The Russians not only respect, but they love a man who has thought and sought for humanity, and, I think, their love but seldom stops 'this side idolatry.' They will exalt a philosopher to a god; they are even able to make of materialism a religion. Because they are so loyal to the human spirit they will load it with chains, believing that they are garlands. And that is why dogmatism has never come so fully into its own as in Russia.

When Shestov began to write nearly twenty years ago, Karl Marx was enthroned and infallible. The fear of such tyrannies has never departed from Shestov. He has fought against them so long and so persistently—even in this book one must always remember that he is face to face with an enemy of which we English have no real conception—that he is at times almost unnerved by the fear that he too may be made an authority and a rule. I do not think that this ultimate hesitation, if understood rightly, diminishes in any way from the interest of his writings: but it does suggest that there may be awaiting him a certain

paralysis of endeavour. There is indeed no absolute truth of which we need take account other than the living personality, and absolute truths are valuable only in so far as they are seen to be necessary manifestations of this mysterious reality. Nevertheless it is in the nature of man, if not to live by absolute truths, at least to live by enunciating them; and to hesitate to satisfy this imperious need is to have resigned a certain measure of one's own creative strength. We may trust to the men of insight who will follow us to read our dogmatisms, our momentary angers, and our unshakable convictions, in terms of our personalities, if these shall be found worthy of their curiosity or their love. And it seems to me that Shestov would have gained in strength if he could have more firmly believed that there would surely be other Shestovs who would read him according to his own intention. But this, I also know, is a counsel of perfection: the courage which he has not would not have been acquired by any intellectual process, and its possession would have deprived him of the courage which he has. As dogmatism in Russia enjoys a supremacy of which we can hardly form an idea, so a continual challenge to its claims demands in the challenger a

courage which it is hard for us rightly to appreciate.

I have not written this foreword in order to prejudice the issue. Shestov will, no doubt, be judged by English readers according to English standards, and I wish no more than to suggest that his greatest quality is one which has become rare among us, and that his peculiarities are due to Russian conditions which have long since ceased to obtain in England. The Russians have much to teach us, and the only way we shall learn, or even know, what we should accept and what reject, is to take count as much as we can of the Russian realities. And the first of these and the last is that in Russia the things of the spirit are held in honour above all others. Because of this the Russian soul is tormented by problems to which we have long been dead, and to which we need to be alive again.

J. M. M.

Postscript.—Leon Shestov is fifty years old. He was born at Kiev, and studied at the university there. His first book was written in 1898. As a writer of small production, he has made his way to recognition slowly: but now he occupies a sure position as one of the most delicate and individual of modern Russian

critics. The essays contained in this volume are taken from the fourth and fifth works in the following list :—

1898. *Shakespeare and his Critic, Brandes.*

1900. *Good in the teaching of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche : Philosophy and Preaching.*

1903. *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche : The Philosophy of Tragedy.*

1905. *The Apotheosis of Groundlessness : An Essay on Dogmatism.*

1908. *Beginnings and Ends.*

1912. *Great Vigils.*

ANTON TCHEKHOV

(CREATION FROM THE VOID)

ANTON TCHEKHOV

(CREATION FROM THE VOID)

Résigne-toi, mon cœur, dors ton sommeil de brute.
(CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.)

I

TCHEKHOV is dead; therefore we may now speak freely of him. For to speak of an artist means to disentangle and reveal the 'tendency' hidden in his works, an operation not always permissible when the subject is still living. Certainly he had a reason for hiding himself, and of course the reason was serious and important. I believe many felt it, and that it was partly on this account that we have as yet had no proper appreciation of Tchekhov. Hitherto in analysing his works the critics have confined themselves to commonplace and *cliché*. Of course they knew they were wrong; but anything is better than to extort the truth from a living person. Mihailovsky alone attempted to approach closer to the source of Tchekhov's creation, and as everybody knows, turned away from it with aversion and even with disgust. Here, by the way, the deceased critic might

have convinced himself once again of the extravagance of the so-called theory of 'art for art's sake.' Every artist has his definite task, his life's work, to which he devotes all his forces. A tendency is absurd when it endeavours to take the place of talent, and to cover impotence and lack of content, or when it is borrowed from the stock of ideas which happen to be in demand at the moment. 'I defend ideals, therefore every one must give me his sympathies.' Such pretences we often see made in literature, and the notorious controversy concerning 'art for art's sake' was evidently maintained upon the double meaning given to the word 'tendency' by its opponents. Some wished to believe that a writer can be saved by the nobility of his tendency; others feared that a tendency would bind them to the performance of alien tasks. Much ado about nothing: ready-made ideas will never endow mediocrity with talent; on the contrary, an original writer will at all costs set himself his own task. And Tchekhov had his *own* business, though there were critics who said that he was the servant of art for its own sake, and even compared him to a bird, carelessly flying. To define his tendency in a word, I would say that Tchekhov was the poet of hopelessness. Stubbornly, sadly, monotonously, during all the years of his literary activity, nearly a quarter of a century long, Tchekhov was doing one thing alone: by one means or another he was killing

human hopes. Herein, I hold, lies the essence of his creation. Hitherto it has been little spoken of. The reasons are quite intelligible. In ordinary language what Tchekhov was doing is called crime, and is visited by condign punishment. But how can a man of talent be punished? Even Mihailovsky, who more than once in his lifetime gave an example of merciless severity, did not raise his hand against Tchekhov. He warned his readers and pointed out the 'evil fire' which he had noticed in Tchekhov's eyes. But he went no further. Tchekhov's immense talent overcame the strict and rigorous critic. It may be, however, that Mihailovsky's own position in literature had more than a little to do with the comparative mildness of his sentence. The younger generation had listened to him uninterruptedly for thirty years, and his word had been law. But afterwards every one was bored with eternally repeating: 'Aristides is just, Aristides is right.' The younger generation began to desire to live and to speak in its own way, and finally the old master was ostracised. There is the same custom in literature as in Terra del Fuego. The young, growing men kill and eat the old. Mihailovsky struggled with all his might, but he no longer felt the strength of conviction that comes from the sense of right. Inwardly, he felt that the young were right, not because they knew the truth—what truth did the economic materialists know?—but because they were young and had their lives before them.

The rising star shines always brighter than the setting, and the old must of their own will yield themselves up to be devoured by the young. Mihailovsky felt this, and perhaps it was this which undermined his former assurance and the firmness of his opinion of old. True, he was still like Gretchen's mother in Goethe: he did not take rich gifts from chance without having previously consulted his confessor. Tchekhov's talent too was taken to the priest, by whom it was evidently rejected as suspect; but Mihailovsky no longer had the courage to set himself against public opinion. The younger generation prized Tchekhov for his talent, his immense talent, and it was plain they would not disown him. What remained for Mihailovsky? He attempted, as I say, to warn them. But no one listened to him, and Tchekhov became one of the most beloved of Russian writers.

Yet the just Aristides was right this time too, as he was right when he gave his warning against Dostoevsky. Now that Tchekhov is no more, we may speak openly. Take Tchekhov's stories, each one separately, or better still, all together; look at him at work. He is constantly, as it were, in ambush, to watch and waylay human hopes. He will not miss a single one of them, not one of them will escape its fate. Art, science, love, inspiration, ideals—choose out all the words with which humanity is wont, or has been in the past, to be consoled or

to be amused—Tchekhov has only to touch them and they instantly wither and die. And Tchekhov himself faded, withered and died before our eyes. Only his wonderful art did not die—his art to kill by a mere touch, a breath, a glance, everything whereby men live and wherein they take their pride. And in this art he was constantly perfecting himself, and he attained to a virtuosity beyond the reach of any of his rivals in European literature. Maupassant often had to strain every effort to overcome his victim. The victim often escaped from Maupassant, though crushed and broken, yet with his life. In Tchekhov's hands, nothing escaped death.

II

I must remind my reader, though it is a matter of general knowledge, that in his earlier work Tchekhov is most unlike the Tchekhov to whom we became accustomed in late years. The young Tchekhov is gay and careless, perhaps even like a flying bird. He published his work in the comic papers. But in 1888 and 1889, when he was only twenty-seven and twenty-eight years old, there appeared *The Tedious Story* and the drama *Ivanov*, two pieces of work which laid the foundations of a new creation. Obviously a sharp and sudden change had taken place in him, which was completely reflected in his works. There is no detailed biography of Tchekhov, and probably will never be, because there is no such

thing as a full biography—I, at all events, cannot name one. Generally biographies tell us everything except what it is important to know. Perhaps in the future it will be revealed to us with the fullest details who was Tchekhov's tailor; but we shall never know what happened to Tchekhov in the time which elapsed between the completion of his story *The Steppe* and the appearance of his first drama. If we would know, we must rely upon his works and our own insight.

Ivanov and *The Tedious Story* seem to me the most autobiographical of all his works. In them almost every line is a sob; and it is hard to suppose that a man could sob so, looking only at another's grief. And it is plain that his grief is a new one, unexpected as though it had fallen from the sky. Here it is, it will endure for ever, and he does not know how to fight against it.

In *Ivanov* the hero compares himself to an overstrained labourer. I do not believe we shall be mistaken if we apply this comparison to the author of the drama as well. There can be practically no doubt that Tchekhov had overstrained himself. And the overstrain came not from hard and heavy labour; no mighty overpowering exploit broke him: he stumbled and fell, he slipped. There comes this nonsensical, stupid, all but invisible accident, and the old Tchekhov of gaiety and mirth is no more. No more stories for *The Alarm Clock*. Instead,

a morose and overshadowed man, a 'criminal' whose words frighten even the experienced and the omniscient.

If you desire it, you can easily be rid of Tchekhov and his work as well. Our language contains two magic words: 'pathological,' and its brother 'abnormal.' Once Tchekhov had overstrained himself, you have a perfectly legal right, sanctified by science and every tradition, to leave him out of all account, particularly seeing that he is already dead, and therefore cannot be hurt by your neglect. That is if you desire to be rid of Tchekhov. But if the desire is for some reason absent, the words 'pathological' and 'abnormal' will have no effect upon you. Perhaps you will go further and attempt to find in Tchekhov's experiences a criterion of the most irrefragable truths and axioms of this consciousness of ours. There is no third way: you must either renounce Tchekhov, or become his accomplice.

The hero of *The Tedious Story* is an old professor; the hero of *Ivanov* a young landlord. But the theme of both works is the same. The professor had overstrained himself, and thereby cut himself off from his past life and from the possibility of taking an active part in human affairs. Ivanov also had overstrained himself and become a superfluous, useless person. Had life been so arranged that death should supervene simultaneously with the loss of health, strength and capacity, then the old professor

and young Ivanov could not have lived for one single hour. Even a blind man could see that they are both broken and are unfit for life. But for reasons unknown to us, wise nature has rejected coincidence of this kind. A man very often goes on living after he has completely lost the capacity of taking from life that wherein we are wont to see its essence and meaning. More striking still, a broken man is generally deprived of everything except the ability to acknowledge and feel his position. Nay, for the most part in such cases the intellectual abilities are refined and sharpened and increased to colossal proportions. It frequently happens that an average man, banal and mediocre, is changed beyond all recognition when he falls into the exceptional situation of Ivanov or the old professor. In him appear signs of a gift, a talent, even of genius. Nietzsche once asked: 'Can an ass be tragical?' He left his question unanswered, but Tolstoi answered for him in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. Ivan Ilyich, it is evident from Tolstoi's description of his life, is a mediocre, average character, one of those men who pass through life avoiding anything that is difficult or problematical, caring exclusively for the calm and pleasantness of earthly existence. Hardly had the cold wind of tragedy blown upon him, than he was utterly transformed. The story of Ivan Ilyich in his last days is as deeply interesting as the life-story of Socrates or Pascal.

In passing I would point out a fact which I consider of great importance. In his work Tchekhov was influenced by Tolstoi, and particularly by Tolstoi's later writings. It is important, because thus a part of Tchekhov's 'guilt' falls upon the great writer of the Russian land. I think that had there been no *Death of Ivan Ilyich*, there would have been no *Ivanov*, and no *Tedious Story*, nor many others of Tchekhov's most remarkable works. But this by no means implies that Tchekhov borrowed a single word from his great predecessor. Tchekhov had enough material of his own: in that respect he needed no help. But a young writer would hardly dare to come forward at his own risk with the thoughts that make the content of *The Tedious Story*. When Tolstoi wrote *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, he had behind him *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, and the firmly established reputation of an artist of the highest rank. All things were permitted to him. But Tchekhov was a young man, whose literary baggage amounted in all to a few dozen tiny stories, hidden in the pages of little known and uninfluential papers. Had Tolstoi not paved the way, had Tolstoi not shown by his example, that in literature it was permitted to tell the truth, to tell everything, then perhaps Tchekhov would have had to struggle long with himself before finding the courage of a public confession, even though it took the form of stories. And even with

Tolstoi before him, how terribly did Tchekhov have to struggle with public opinion. 'Why does he write his horrible stories and plays?' every one asked himself. 'Why does the writer systematically choose for his heroes situations from which there is not, and cannot possibly be, any escape?' What can be said in answer to the endless complaints of the old professor and Katy, his pupil? This means that there is, essentially, something to be said. From times immemorial, literature has accumulated a large and varied store of all kinds of general ideas and conceptions, material and metaphysical, to which the masters have recourse the moment the over-exacting and over-restless human voice begins to be heard. This is exactly the point. Tchekhov himself, a writer and an educated man, refused in advance every possible consolation, material or metaphysical. Not even in Tolstoi, who set no great store by philosophical systems, will you find such keenly expressed disgust for every kind of conceptions and ideas as in Tchekhov. He is well aware that conceptions ought to be esteemed and respected, and he reckons his inability to bend the knee before that which educated people consider holy as a defect against which he must struggle with all his strength. And he does struggle with all his strength against this defect. But not only is the struggle unavailing; the longer Tchekhov lives, the weaker grows the power of lofty words over him, in spite of his

own reason and his conscious will. Finally, he frees himself entirely from ideas of every kind, and loses even the notion of connection between the happenings of life. Herein lies the most important and original characteristic of his creation. Anticipating a little, I would here point to his comedy, *The Sea-Gull*, where, in defiance of all literary principles, the basis of action appears to be not the logical development of passions, or the inevitable connection between cause and effect, but naked accident, ostentatiously nude. As one reads the play, it seems at times that one has before one a copy of a newspaper with an endless series of news paragraphs, heaped upon one another, without order and without previous plan. Sovereign accident reigns everywhere and in everything, this time boldly throwing the gauntlet to all conceptions. In this, I repeat, is Tchekhov's greatest originality, and this, strangely enough, is the source of his most bitter experiences. He did not want to be original; he made superhuman efforts to be like everybody else: but there is no escaping one's destiny. How many men, above all among writers, wear their fingers to the bone in the effort to be unlike others, and yet they cannot shake themselves free of *cliché*—yet Tchekhov was original against his will! Evidently originality does not depend upon the readiness to proclaim revolutionary opinions at all costs. The newest and boldest idea may and often does appear tedious and

vulgar. In order to become original, instead of inventing an idea, one must achieve a difficult and painful labour; and, since men avoid labour and suffering, the really new is for the most part born in man against his will.

III

'A man cannot reconcile himself to the accomplished fact; neither can he refuse so to reconcile himself: and there is no third course. Under such conditions "action" is impossible. He can only fall down and weep and beat his head against the floor.' So Tchekhov speaks of one of his heroes; but he might say the same of them all, without exception. The author takes care to put them in such a situation that only one thing is left for them,—to fall down and beat their heads against the floor. With strange, mysterious obstinacy they refuse all the accepted means of salvation. Nicolai Stepanovich, the old professor in *The Tedious Story*, might have attempted to forget himself for a while or to console himself with memories of the past. But memories only irritate him. He was once an eminent scholar: now he cannot work. Once he was able to hold the attention of his audience for two hours on end; now he cannot do it even for a quarter of an hour. He used to have friends and comrades, he used to love his pupils and assistants, his wife and

children; now he cannot concern himself with any one. If people do arouse any feelings at all within him, then they are only feelings of hatred, malice and envy. He has to confess it to himself with the truthfulness which came to him—he knows not why nor whence—in place of the old diplomatic skill, possessed by all clever and normal men, whereby he saw and said only that which makes for decent human relations and healthy states of mind. Now everything which he sees or thinks only serves to poison, in himself and others, the few joys which adorn human life. With a certainty which he never attained on the best days and hours of his old theoretical research, he feels that he is become a criminal, having committed no crime. All that he was engaged in before was good, necessary, and useful. He tells you of his past, and you can see that he was always right and ready at any moment of the day or the night to answer the severest judge who should examine not only his actions, but his thoughts as well. Now not only would an outsider condemn him, he condemns himself. He confesses openly that he is all compact of envy and hatred.

'The best and most sacred right of kings,' he says, 'is the right to pardon. And I have always felt myself a king so long as I used this right prodigally. I never judged, I was compassionate, I pardoned every one right and left. . . . But now I am king no

more. There 's something going on in me which belongs only to slaves. Day and night evil thoughts roam about in my head, and feelings which I never knew before have made their home in my soul. I hate and despise ; I 'm exasperated, disturbed, and afraid. I 've become strict beyond measure, exacting, unkind and suspicious. . . . What does it all mean ? If my new thoughts and feelings come from a change of my convictions, where could the change come from ? Has the world grown worse and I better, or was I blind and indifferent before ? But if the change is due to the general decline of my physical and mental powers—I am sick and losing weight every day—then I am in a pitiable position. It means that my new thoughts are abnormal and unhealthy, that I must be ashamed of them and consider them valueless. . . .'

The question is asked by the old professor on the point of death, and in his person by Tchekhov himself. Which is better, to be a king, or an old, envious, malicious ' toad,' as he calls himself elsewhere ? There is no denying the originality of the question. In the words above you feel the price which Tchekhov had to pay for his originality, and with how great joy he would have exchanged all his original thoughts—at the moment when his ' new ' point of view had become clear to him —for the most ordinary, banal capacity for

benevolence. He has no doubt felt that his way of thinking is pitiable, shameful and disgusting. His moods revolt him no less than his appearance, which he describes in the following lines: '. . . I am a man of sixty-two, with a bald head, false teeth and an incurable tic. My name is as brilliant and prepossessing, as I myself am dull and ugly. My head and hands tremble from weakness; my neck, like that of one of Turgeniev's heroines, resembles the handle of a counter-bass; my chest is hollow and my back narrow. When I speak or read my mouth twists, and when I smile my whole face is covered with senile, deathly wrinkles.' Unpleasant face, unpleasant moods! Let the most sweet natures and compassionate person but give a side-glance at such a monster, and despite himself a cruel thought would awaken in him: that he should lose no time in killing, in utterly destroying this pitiful and disgusting vermin, or if the laws forbid recourse to such strong measures, at least in hiding him as far as possible from human eyes, in some prison or hospital or asylum. These are measures of suppression sanctioned, I believe, not only by legislation, but by eternal morality as well. But here you encounter resistance of a particular kind. Physical strength to struggle with the warders, executioners, attendants, moralists—the old professor has none; a little child could knock him down. Persuasion and prayer, he knows well, will avail him

nothing. So he strikes out in despair: he begins to cry over all the world in a terrible, wild, heartrending voice about some rights of his: '. . . I have a passionate and hysterical desire to stretch out my hands and moan aloud. I want to cry out that fate has doomed me, a famous man, to death; that in some six months here in the auditorium another will be master. I want to cry out that I am poisoned; that new ideas that I did not know before have poisoned the last days of my life, and sting my brain incessantly like mosquitoes. At that moment my position seems so terrible to me that I want all my students to be terrified, to jump from their seats and rush panic-stricken to the door, shrieking in despair.' The professor's arguments will hardly move any one. Indeed I do not know if there is any argument in those words. But this awful, inhuman moan. . . . Imagine the picture: a bald, ugly old man, with trembling hands, and twisted mouth, and skinny neck, eyes mad with fear, wallowing like a beast on the ground and wailing, wailing, wailing. . . . What does he want? He had lived a long and interesting life; now he had only to round it off nicely, with all possible calm, quietly and solemnly to take leave of this earthly existence. Instead he rends himself, and flings himself about, calls almost the whole universe to judgment, and clutches convulsively at the few days left to him. And Tchekhov—what did Tchekhov do? Instead of passing

by on the other side, he supports the prodigious monster, devotes pages and pages to the 'experiences of his soul,' and gradually brings the reader to a point at which, instead of a natural and lawful sense of indignation, unprofitable and dangerous sympathies for the decomposing, decaying creature are awakened in his heart. But every one knows that it is impossible to *help* the professor; and if it is impossible to help, then it follows we must forget. That is as plain as *a b c*. What use or what meaning could there be in the endless picturing—daubing, as Tolstoi would say—of the intolerable pains of the agony which inevitably leads to death?

If the professor's 'new' thoughts and feelings shone bright with beauty, nobility or heroism, the case would be different. The reader could learn something from it. But Tchekhov's story shows that these qualities belonged to his hero's old thoughts. Now that his illness has begun, there has sprung up within him a revulsion from everything which even remotely resembles a lofty feeling. When his pupil Katy turns to him for advice what she should do, the famous scholar, the friend of Pirogov, Kavelin and Nekrassov, who had taught so many generations of young men, does not know what to answer. Absurdly he chooses from his memory a whole series of pleasant-sounding words; but they have lost all meaning for him. What answer shall he give? he asks himself. 'It is easy to say, Work, or

divide your property among the poor, or know yourself, and because it is easy, I do not know what to answer.' Katy, still young, healthy and beautiful, has by Tchekhov's offices fallen like the professor into a trap from which no human power can deliver her. From the moment that she knew hopelessness, she had won all the author's sympathy. While a person is settled to some work, while he has a future of some kind before him, Tchekhov is utterly indifferent to him. If he does describe him, then he usually does it hastily and in a tone of scornful irony. But when he is entangled, and so entangled that he cannot be disentangled by any means, then Tchekhov begins to wake up. Colour, energy, creative force, inspiration make their appearance. Therein perhaps lies the secret of his political indifferentism. Notwithstanding all his distrust of projects for a brighter future, Tchekhov like Dostoevsky was evidently not wholly convinced that social reforms and social science were important. However difficult the social question may be, still it may be solved. Some day, perhaps people will so arrange themselves on the earth as to live and die without suffering: further than that ideal humanity cannot go. Perhaps the authors of stout volumes on Progress do guess and foresee something. But just for that reason their work is alien to Tchekhov. At first by instinct, then consciously, he was attracted to problems which

are by essence insoluble like that presented in *The Tedious Story*: there you have helplessness, sickness, the prospect of inevitable death, and no hope whatever to change the situation by a hair. This infatuation, whether conscious or instinctive, clearly runs counter to the demands of common sense and normal will. But there is nothing else to expect from Tchekhov, an overstrained man. Every one knows, or has heard, of hopelessness. On every side, before our very eyes, are happening terrible and intolerable tragedies, and if every doomed man were to raise such an awful alarm about his destruction as Nicolai Stepanovich, life would become an inferno; Nicolai Stepanovich must not cry his sufferings aloud over the world, but be careful to trouble people as little as possible. And Tchekhov should have assisted this reputable endeavour by every means in his power. As though there were not thousands of tedious stories in the world—they cannot be counted! And above all stories of the kind that Tchekhov tells should be hidden with special care from human eyes. We have here to do with the decomposition of a living organism. What should we say to a man who would prevent corpses from being buried, and would dig decaying bodies from the grave, even though it were on the ground, or rather on the pretext, that they were the bodies of his intimate friends, even famous men of reputation and genius? Such an occupation would rouse

in a normal and healthy mind nothing but disgust and terror. Once upon a time, according to popular superstition, sorcerers, necromancers and wizards kept company with the dead, and found a certain pleasure or even a real satisfaction in that ghastly occupation. But they generally hid themselves away from mankind in forests and caves, or betook themselves to deserts where they might in isolation surrender themselves to their unnatural inclinations; and if their deeds were eventually brought to light, healthy men requited them with the stake, the gallows, and the rack. The worst kind of that which is called evil, as a rule, had for its source and origin an interest and taste for carrion. Man forgave every crime—cruelty, violence, murder; but he never forgave the unmotived love of death and the seeking of its secret. In this matter modern times, being free from prejudices, have advanced little from the Middle Ages. Perhaps the only difference is that we, engaged in practical affairs, have lost the natural *flair* for good and evil. Theoretically we are even convinced that in our time there are not and cannot be wizards and necromancers. Our confidence and carelessness in this reached such a point, that almost everybody saw even in Dostoevsky only an artist and a publicist, and seriously discussed with him whether the Russian peasant needed to be flogged and whether we ought to lay hands on Constantinople.

Mihailovsky alone vaguely conjectured what it all might be when he called the author of *The Brothers Karamazov* a 'treasure-digger.' I say he 'dimly conjectured, because I think that the deceased critic made the remark partly in allegory, even in joke. But none of Dostoevsky's other critics made, even by accident, a truer slip of the pen. Tchekhov, too, was a 'treasure-digger,' a sorcerer, a necromancer, an adept in the black art; and this explains his singular infatuation for death, decay and hopelessness.

Tchekhov was not of course the only writer to make death the subject of his works. But not the theme is important but the manner of its treatment. Tchekhov understands that. 'In all the thoughts, feelings, and ideas,' he says, '[which] I form about anything, there is wanting the something universal which could bind all these together in one whole. Each feeling and each thought lives detached in me, and in all my opinions about science, the theatre, literature, and my pupils, and in all the little pictures which my imagination paints, not even the most cunning analyst will discover what is called the general idea, or the god of the living man. And if this is not there, then nothing is there. In poverty such as this, a serious infirmity, fear of death, influence of circumstances and people would have been enough to overthrow and shatter all that I formerly considered as my conception of the world, and all wherein

I saw the meaning and joy of my life. . . .' In these words one of the ' newest ' of Tchekhov's ideas finds expression, one by which the whole of his subsequent creation is defined. It is expressed in a modest, apologetic form : a man confesses that he is unable to subordinate his thoughts to a higher idea, and in that inability he sees his weakness. This was enough to avert from him to some extent the thunders of criticism and the judgment of public opinion. We readily forgive the repentant sinner ! But it is an unprofitable clemency : to expiate one's guilt, it is not enough to confess it. What was the good of Tchekhov's putting on sackcloth and ashes and publicly confessing his guilt, if he was inwardly unchanged ? If, while his words acknowledged the general idea as god (without a capital, indeed), he did nothing whatever for it ? In words he burns incense to god, in deed he curses him. Before his disease a conception of the world brought him happiness, now it had shattered into fragments. Is it not natural to ask whether the conception actually did ever bring him happiness ? Perhaps the happiness had its own independent origin, and the conception was invited only as a general to a wedding, for outward show, and never played any essential part. Tchekhov tells us circumstantially what joys the professor found in his scientific work, his lectures to the students, his family, and in a good dinner. In all these were present together the conception of the

world and the idea, and they did not take away from, but as it were embellished life; so that it seemed that he was working for the ideal, as well as creating a family and dining. But now, when for the same ideal's sake he has to remain inactive, to suffer, to remain awake of nights, to swallow with effort food that has become loathsome to him—the conception of the world is shattered into fragments! And it amounts to this, that a conception with a dinner is right, and a dinner without a conception equally right—this needs no argument—and a conception *an und für sich* is of no value whatever. Here is the essence of the words quoted from Tchekhov. He confesses with horror the presence within him of that 'new' idea. It seems to him that he alone of all men is so weak and insignificant, that the others . . . well, they need only ideals and conceptions. And so it is, surely, if we may believe what people write in books. Tchekhov plagues, tortures and worries himself in every possible way, but he can alter nothing; nay worse, conceptions and ideas, towards which a great many people behave quite carelessly—after all, these innocent things do not merit any other attitude—in Tchekhov become the objects of bitter, inexorable, and merciless hatred. He cannot free himself at one single stroke from the power of ideas: therefore he begins a long, slow and stubborn war, I would call it a guerilla war, against the tyrant who had enslaved him. The

whole history and the separate episodes of his struggle are of absorbing interest, because the most conspicuous representatives of literature have hitherto been convinced that ideas have a magical power. What are the majority of writers doing but constructing conceptions of the world—and believing that they are engaged in a work of extraordinary importance and sanctity? Tchekhov offended very many literary men. If his punishment was comparatively slight, that was because he was very cautious, and waged war with the air of bringing tribute to the enemy, and secondly, because to talent much is forgiven.

IV

The content of *The Tedious Story* thus reduces to the fact that the professor, expressing his 'new' thoughts, in essence declares that he finds it impossible to acknowledge the power of the 'idea' over himself, or conscientiously to fulfil that which men consider the supreme purpose, and in the service whereof they see the mission, the sacred mission of man. 'God be my judge, I haven't courage enough to act according to my conscience,' such is the only answer which Tchekhov finds in his soul to all demands for a 'conception.' This attitude towards 'conceptions' becomes second nature with Tchekhov. A conception makes demands; a man acknowledges the justice of these demands

and methodically satisfies none of them. Moreover, the justice of the demands meets with less and less acknowledgment from him. In *The Tedious Story* the idea still judges the man and tortures him with the mercilessness peculiar to all things inanimate. Exactly like a splinter stuck into a living body, the idea, alien and hostile, mercilessly performs its high mission, until at length the man firmly resolves to draw the splinter out of his flesh, however painful that difficult operation may be. In *Ivanov* the rôle of the idea is already changed. There not the idea persecutes Tchekhov, but Tchekhov the idea, and with the subtlest division and contempt. The voice of the living nature rises above the artificial habits of civilisation. True, the struggle still continues, if you will, with alternating fortunes. But the old humility is no more. More and more Tchekhov emancipates himself from old prejudices and goes—he himself could hardly say whither, were he asked. But he prefers to remain without an answer, rather than to accept any of the traditional answers. 'I know quite well I have no more than six months to live ; and it would seem that now I ought to be mainly occupied with questions of the darkness beyond the grave, and the visions which will visit my sleep in the earth. But somehow my soul is not curious of these questions, though my mind grants every atom of their importance.' In contrast to the habits of the past, reason is once more pushed out of

the door with all due respect, while its rights are handed over to the 'soul,' to the dark, vague aspiration which Tchekhov by instinct trusts more than the bright, clear consciousness which beforehand determines the beyond, now that he stands before the fatal pale which divides man from the eternal mystery. Is scientific philosophy indignant? Is Tchekhov undermining its surest foundations? But he is an overstrained, abnormal man. Certainly you are not bound to listen to him; but once you have decided to do so then you must be prepared for anything. A normal person, even though he be a metaphysician of the extremest ethereal brand, always adjusts his theories to the requirements of the moment; he destroys only to build up from the old material once more. This is the reason why material never fails him. Obedient to the fundamental law of human nature, long since noted and formulated by the wise, he is content to confine himself to the modest part of a seeker after forms. Out of iron, which he finds in nature ready to his hand, he forges a sword or a plough, a lance or a sickle. The idea of creating out of a void hardly even enters his mind. But Tchekhov's heroes, persons abnormal *par excellence*, are faced with this abnormal and dreadful necessity. Before them always lies hopelessness, helplessness, the utter impossibility of any action whatsoever. And yet they live on, they do not die.

A strange question, and one of extraordinary

moment, here suggests itself. I said that it was foreign to human nature to create out of a void. Yet nature often deprives man of ready material, while at the same time she demands imperatively that he should create. Does this mean that nature contradicts herself, or that she perverts her creatures ? Is it not more correct to admit that the conception of perversion is of purely human origin. Perhaps nature is much more economical and wise than our wisdom, and maybe we should discover much more if instead of dividing people into necessary and superfluous, useful and noxious, good and bad, we suppressed the tendency to subjective valuation in ourselves and endeavoured with greater confidence to accept her creations ? Otherwise you come immediately—to 'the evil gleam,' 'treasure-digging,' sorcery and black magic—and a wall is raised between men which neither logical argument nor even a battery of artillery can break down. I hardly dare hope that this consideration will appear convincing to those who are used to maintaining the norm ; and it is probably unnecessary that the notion of the great opposition of good and bad which is alive among men should die away, just as it is unnecessary that children should be born with the experience of men, or that red cheeks and curly hair should vanish from the earth. At any rate it is impossible. The world has many centuries to its reckoning, many nations have lived and died upon the earth, yet as far as we know from

the books and traditions that have survived to us, the dispute between good and evil was never hushed. And it always so happened that good was not afraid of the light of day, and good men lived a united, social life; while evil hid itself in darkness, and the wicked always stood alone. Nor could it have been otherwise.

All Tchekhov's heroes fear the light. They are lonely. They are ashamed of their hopelessness, and they know that men cannot help them. They go somewhere, perhaps even forward, but they call to no one to follow. All things are taken from them: they must create everything anew. Thence most probably is derived the unconcealed contempt with which they behave to the most precious products of common human creativeness. On whatever subject you begin to talk with a Tchekhov hero he has one reply to everything: *Nobody can teach me anything.* You offer him a new conception of the world: already in your very first words he feels that they all reduce to an attempt to lay the old bricks and stones over again, and he turns from you with impatience, and often with rudeness. Tchekhov is an extremely cautious writer. He fears and takes into account public opinion. Yet how unconcealed is the aversion he displays to accepted ideas and conceptions of the world. In *The Tedious Story,* he at any rate preserves the tone and attitude of outward obedience. Later he throws aside all precautions, and instead of reproach-

ing himself for his inability to submit to the general idea, openly rebels against it and jeers at it. In *Ivanov* it already is sufficiently expressed; there was reason for the outburst of indignation which this play provoked in its day. Ivanov, I have already said, is a dead man. The only thing the artist can do with him is to bury him decently, that is, to praise his past, pity his present, and then, in order to mitigate the cheerless impression produced by death, to invite the general idea to the funeral. He might recall the universal problems of humanity in any one of the many stereotyped forms, and thus the difficult case which seemed insoluble would be removed. Together with Ivanov's death he should portray a bright young life, full of promise, and the impression of death and destruction would lose all its sting and bitterness. Tchekhov does just the opposite. Instead of endowing youth and ideals with power over destruction and death, as all philosophical systems and many works of art had done, he ostentatiously makes the good-for-nothing wreck Ivanov the centre of all events. Side by side with Ivanov there are young lives, and the idea is also given her representatives. But the young Sasha, a wonderful and charming girl, who falls utterly in love with the broken hero, not only does not save her lover, but herself perishes under the burden of the impossible task. And the idea? It is enough to recall the figure of Doctor Lvov alone, whom Tchekhov entrusted

with the responsible rôle of a representative of the all-powerful idea, and you will at once perceive that he considers himself not as subject and vassal, but as the bitterest enemy of the idea. The moment Doctor Lvov opens his mouth, all the characters, as though acting on a previous agreement, vie with each other in their haste to interrupt him in the most insulting way, by jests, threats, and almost by smacks in the face. But the doctor fulfils his duties as a representative of the great power with no less skill and conscientiousness than his predecessors —Starodoum[1] and the other reputable heroes of the old drama. He champions the wronged, seeks to restore rights that have been trodden underfoot, sets himself dead against injustice. Has he stepped beyond the limits of his plenipotentiary powers? Of course not; but where Ivanovs and hopelessness reign there is not and cannot be room for the idea.

They cannot possibly live together. And the eyes of the reader, who is accustomed to think that every kingdom may fall and perish, yet the kingdom of the idea stands firm *in saecula saeculorum*, behold a spectacle unheard of: the idea dethroned by a helpless, broken, good-for-nothing man! What is there that Ivanov does not say? In the very first act he fires off a tremendous tirade, not at a chance corner, but at the incarnate idea—Starodoum-Lvov.

[1] A hero from Fon-Vizin's play *The Minor*. Starodoum is a *raisonneur*, a 'positive' type, always uttering truisms.

'I have the right to give you advice. Don't you marry a Jewess, or an abnormal, or a blue-stocking. Choose something ordinary, greyish, without any bright colours or superfluous shades. Make it a principle to build your life of *clichés*. The more grey and monotonous the background, the better. My dear man, don't fight thousands single-handed, don't tilt at windmills, don't run your head against the wall. God save you from all kinds of Back-to-the-Landers' advanced doctrines, passionate speeches. . . . Shut yourself tight in your own shell, and do the tiny little work set you by God. . . . It 's cosier, honester, and healthier.'

Doctor Lvov, the representative of the all-powerful, sovereign idea, feels that his sovereign's majesty is injured, that to suffer such an offence really means to abdicate the throne. Surely Ivanov was a vassal, and so he must remain. How dare he let his tongue advise, how dare he raise his voice when it is his part to listen reverently, and to obey in silent resignation? This is rank rebellion! Lvov attempts to draw himself up to his full height and answer the arrogant rebel with dignity. Nothing comes of it. In a weak, trembling voice he mutters the accustomed words, which but lately had invincible power. But they do not produce their customary effect. Their virtue is departed. Whither? Lvov dares not own it even to himself. But it is no longer a secret to any one. Whatever mean and ugly things Ivanov may have done—

Tchekhov is not close-fisted in this matter: in his hero's conduct-book are written all manner of offences; almost to the deliberate murder of a woman devoted to him—it is to him and not to Lvov that public opinion bows. Ivanov is the spirit of destruction, rude, violent, pitiless, sticking at nothing: yet the word 'scoundrel,' which the doctor tears out of himself with a painful effort and hurls at him, does not stick to him. He is somehow right, with his own peculiar right, to others inconceivable, yet still, if we may believe Tchekhov, incontestable. Sasha, a creature of youth and insight and talent, passes by the honest Starodoum-Lvov unheeding, on her way to render worship to him. The whole play is based on that. It is true, Ivanov in the end shoots himself, and that may, if you like, give you a formal ground for believing that the final victory remained with Lvov. And Tchekhov did well to end the drama in this way—it could not be spun out to infinity. It would have been no easy matter to tell the whole of Ivanov's history. Tchekhov went on writing for fifteen years after, all the time telling the unfinished story, yet even then he had to break it off without reaching the end. . . .

It would show small understanding of Tchekhov to take it into one's head to interpret Ivanov's words to Lvov as meaning that Tchekhov, like the Tolstoi of the *War and Peace* period, saw his ideal in the everyday arrangement of life. Tchekhov was only fighting against

the idea, and he said to it the most abusive thing that entered his head. For what can be more insulting to the idea than to be forced to listen to the praise of everyday life? But when the opportunity came his way, Tchekhov could describe everyday life with equal venom. The story, *The Teacher of Literature*, may serve as an example. The teacher lives entirely by Ivanov's prescription. He has his job, and his wife—neither Jewess nor abnormal, nor blue-stocking—and a home that fits like a shell . . . ; but all this does not prevent Tchekhov from driving the poor teacher by slow degrees into the usual trap, and bringing him to a condition wherein it is left to him only 'to fall down and weep, and beat his head against the floor.' Tchekhov had no 'ideal,' not even the ideal of 'everyday life' which Tolstoi glorified with such inimitable and incomparable mastery in his early works. An ideal presupposes submission, the voluntary denial of one's own right to independence, freedom and power; and demands of this kind, even a hint of such demands, roused in Tchekhov all that force of disgust and repulsion of which he alone was capable.

V

Thus the real, the only hero of Tchekhov, is the hopeless man. He has absolutely no *action* left for him in life, save to beat his head against the stones. It is not surprising that such a man

should be intolerable to his neighbours. Everywhere he brings death and destruction with him. He himself is aware of it, but he has not the power to go apart from men. With all his soul he endeavours to tear himself out of his horrible condition. Above all he is attracted to fresh, young, untouched beings; with their help he hopes to recover his right to life which he has lost. The hope is vain. The beginning of decay always appears, all-conquering, and at the end Tchekhov's hero is left to himself alone. He has nothing, he must create everything for himself. And this 'creation out of the void,' or more truly the possibility of this creation, is the only problem which can occupy and inspire Tchekhov. When he has stripped his hero of the last shred, when nothing is left for him but to beat his head against the wall, Tchekhov begins to feel something like satisfaction, a strange fire lights in his burnt-out eyes, a fire which Mihailovsky did not call 'evil' in vain.

Creation out of the void! Is not this task beyond the limit of human powers, of human *rights*? Mihailovsky obviously had one straight answer to the question. . . . As for Tchekhov himself, if the question were put to him in such a deliberately definite form, he would probably be unable to answer, although he was continually engaged in the activity, or more properly, because he was continually so engaged. Without fear of mistake, one may say that the people who answer the question without hesitation in either sense

have never come near to it, or to any of the so-called ultimate questions of life. Hesitation is a necessary and integral element in the judgment of those men whom Fate has brought near to false problems. How Tchekhov's hand trembled while he wrote the concluding lines of his *Tedious Story*! The professor's pupil—the being nearest and dearest to him, but like himself, for all her youth, overstrained and bereft of all hope—has come to Kharkov to seek his advice. The following conversation takes place:

'"Nicolai Stepanich!" she says, growing pale and pressing her hands to her breast. "Nicolai Stepanich! I can't go on like this any longer. For God's sake tell me now, immediately. What shall I do? Tell me, what shall I do?"

'"What can I say? I am beaten. I can say nothing."

'"But tell me, I implore you," she continues, out of breath and trembling all over her body. "I swear to you, I can't go on like this any longer. I haven't the strength."

'She drops into a chair and begins to sob. She throws her head back, wrings her hands, stamps with her feet; her hat falls from her head and dangles by its string, her hair is loosened.

'"Help me, help," she implores. "I can't bear it any more."

'"There's nothing that I can say to you, Katy," I say.

'"Help me," she sobs, seizing my hand and kissing it. "You're my father, my only friend.

You 're wise and learned, and you 've lived long! You were a teacher. Tell me what to do."

' " Upon my conscience, Katy, I do not know."

' I am bewildered and surprised, stirred by her sobbing, and I can hardly stand upright.

' " Let 's have some breakfast, Katy," I say with a constrained smile.

' Instantly I add in a sinking voice : " I shall be dead soon, Katy . . ."

' " Only one word, only one word," she weeps and stretches out her hands to me. " What shall I do ? . . . " '

But the professor has not the word to give. He turns the conversation to the weather, Kharkov and other indifferent matters. Katy gets up and holds out her hand to him, without looking at him. ' I want to ask her,' he concludes his story, ' " So it means you won't be at my funeral ? " But she does not look at me ; her hand is cold and like a stranger's . . . I escort her to the door in silence. . . . She goes out of my room and walks down the long passage, without looking back. She knows that my eyes are following her, and probably on the landing she will look back. No, she did not look back. The black dress showed for the last time, her steps were stilled. . . . Good-bye, my treasure ! . . .'

The only answer which the wise, educated, long-lived Nicolai Stepanovich, a teacher all his life, can give to Katy's question is, ' I don't know.' There is not, in all his great experience

of the past, a single method, rule, or suggestion, which might apply, even in the smallest degree, to the wild incongruity of the new conditions of Katy's life and his own. Katy can live thus no longer; neither can he himself continue to endure his disgusting and shameful helplessness. They both, old and young, with their whole hearts desire to support each other; they can between them find no way. To her question: 'What shall I do?' he replied: 'I shall soon be dead.' To his 'I shall soon be dead' she answers with wild sobbing, wringing her hands, and absurdly repeating the same words over and over again. It would have been better to have asked no question, not to have begun that frank conversation of souls. But they do not yet understand that. In their old life talk would bring them relief and frank confession, intimacy. But now, after such a meeting they can suffer each other no longer. Katy leaves the old professor, her foster-father, her true father and friend, in the knowledge that he has become a stranger to her. She did not even turn round towards him as she went away. Both felt that nothing remained save to beat their heads against the wall. Therein each acts at his own peril, and there can be no dreaming of a consoling union of souls.

VI

Tchekhov knew what conclusions he had reached in *The Tedious Story* and *Ivanov*.

Some of his critics also knew, and told him so. I cannot venture to say what was the cause—whether fear of public opinion, or his horror at his own discoveries, or both together—but evidently there came a moment to Tchekhov when he decided at all costs to surrender his position and retreat. The fruit of this decision was *Ward No. 6*. In this story the hero of the drama is the same familiar Tchekhov character, the doctor. The setting, too, is quite the usual one, though changed to a slight extent. Nothing in particular has occurred in the doctor's life. He happened to come to an out-of-the way place in the provinces, and gradually, by continually avoiding life and people, he reached a condition of utter will-lessness, which he represented to himself as the ideal of human happiness. He is indifferent to everything, beginning with his hospital, where he can hardly ever be found, where under the reign of the drunken brute of an assistant the patients are swindled and neglected.

In the mental ward reigns a porter who is a discharged soldier: he punches his restless patients into shape. The doctor does not care, as though he were living in some distant other world, and does not understand what is going on before his very eyes. He happens to enter his ward and to have a conversation with one of his patients. He listens quietly to him; but his answer is words instead of deeds. He tries to show his lunatic acquaintance that external influences cannot affect us in any way at all. The

lunatic does not agree, becomes impertinent, presents objections, in which, as in the thoughts of many lunatics, nonsensical assertions are mixed with very profound remarks. Indeed, there is so little nonsense that from the conversation you would hardly imagine that you have to do with a lunatic. The doctor is delighted with his new friend, but does nothing whatsoever to make him more comfortable. The patient is still under the porter's thumb as he used to be, and the porter gives him a thrashing on the least provocation. The patient, the doctor, the people round, the whole setting of the hospital and the doctor's rooms, are described with wonderful talent. Everything induces you to make absolutely no resistance and to become fatalistically indifferent :—let them get drunk, let them fight, let them thieve, let them be brutal—what does it matter ! Evidently it is so predestined by the supreme council of nature. The philosophy of inactivity which the doctor professes is as it were prompted and whispered by the immutable laws of human existence. Apparently there is no force which may tear one from its power. So far everything is more or less in the Tchekhov style. But the end is completely different. By the intrigues of his colleague, the doctor himself is taken as a patient into the mental ward. He is deprived of freedom, shut up in a wing of the hospital, and even thrashed, thrashed by the same porter whose behaviour he had taught his lunatic

acquaintance to accept, thrashed before his acquaintance's very eyes. The doctor instantly awakens as though out of a dream. A fierce desire to struggle and to protest manifests itself in him. True, at this moment he dies ; but the idea is triumphant, still. The critics could consider themselves quite satisfied. Tchekhov had openly repented and renounced the theory of non-resistance ; and, I believe, *Ward No. 6* met with a sympathetic reception at the time. In passing I would say that the doctor dies very beautifully : in his last moments he sees a herd of deer. . . .

Indeed, the construction of this story leaves no doubt in the mind. Tchekhov wished to compromise, and he compromised. He had come to feel how intolerable was hopelessness, how impossible the creation from a void. To beat one's head against the stones, eternally to beat one's head against the stones, is so horrible that it were better to return to idealism. Then the truth of the wonderful Russian saying was proved : 'Don't forswear the beggar's wallet nor the prison.' Tchekhov joined the choir of Russian writers, and began to praise the idea. But not for long. His very next story, *The Duel*, has a different character. Its conclusion is also apparently idealistic, but only in appearance. The principal hero Layevsky is a parasite like all Tchekhov's heroes. He does nothing, can do nothing, does not even wish to do anything, lives chiefly at others' expense, runs

up debts, seduces women. . . . His condition is intolerable. He is living with another man's wife, whom he had come to loathe as he loathes himself, yet he cannot get rid of her. He is always in straitened circumstances and in debt everywhere: his friends dislike and despise him. His state of mind is always such that he is ready to run no matter where, never looking backwards, only away from the place where he is living now. His illegal wife is in roughly the same position, unless it be even more horrible. Without knowing why, without love, without even being attracted, she gives herself to the first, commonplace man she meets; and then she feels as though she had been covered from head to foot in filth, and the filth had stuck so close to her that not ocean itself could wash her clean. This couple lives in the world, in a remote little place in the Caucasus, and naturally attracts Tchekhov's attention. There is no denying the interest of the subject: two persons befouled, who can neither tolerate others nor themselves. . . .

For contrast's sake Tchekhov brings Layevsky into collision with the zoologist, Von Koren, who has come to the seaside town on important business—every one recognises its importance—to study the embryology of the medusa. Von Koren, as one may see from his name, is of German origin, and therefore deliberately represented as a healthy, normal, clean man, the grandchild of Goncharov's Stolz, the direct opposite of Layevsky, who on his side is nearly

related to our old friend Oblomov. But in Goncharov the contrast between Stolz and Oblomov is quite different in nature and meaning to the contrast in Tchekhov. The novelist of the 'forties hoped that a *rapprochement* with Western culture would renew and resuscitate Russia. And Oblomov himself is not represented as an utterly hopeless person. He is only lazy, inactive, unenterprising. You have the feeling that were he to awaken he would be a match for a dozen Stolzs. Layevsky is a different affair. He is awake already, he was awakened years ago, but his awakening did him no good. . . . 'He does not love nature; he has no God; he or his companions had ruined every trustful girl he had known; all his life long he had not planted one single little tree, nor grown one blade of grass in his own garden, nor while he lived among the living, had he saved the life of one single fly; but only ruined and destroyed, and lied, and lied. . . .' The good-natured sluggard Oblomov degenerated into a disgusting, terrible animal, while the clean Stolz lived and remained clean in his posterity! But to the new Oblomov he speaks differently. Von Koren calls Layevsky a scoundrel and a rogue, and demands that he should be punished with the utmost severity. To reconcile them is impossible. The more they meet, the deeper, the more merciless, the more implacable is their hatred for each other. It is impossible that they should live together on

the earth. It must be one or the other: either the normal Von Koren, or the degenerate decadent Layevsky. Of course, all the external, material force is on Von Koren's side in the struggle. He is always in the right, always victorious, always triumphant—in act no less than in theory. It is curious that Tchekhov, the irreconcilable enemy of all kinds of philosophy—not one of his heroes philosophises, or if he does, his philosophising is unsuccessful, ridiculous, weak and unconvincing—makes an exception for Von Koren, a typical representative of the positive, materialistic school. His words breathe vigour and conviction. They have in them even pathos and a maximum of logical sequence. There are many materialist heroes in Tchekhov's stories, but in their materialism there is a tinge of veiled idealism, according to the stereotyped prescription of the 'sixties. Such heroes Tchekhov ridicules and derides. Idealism of every kind, whether open or concealed, roused feelings of intolerable bitterness in Tchekhov. He found it more pleasant to listen to the merciless menaces of a downright materialist than to accept the dry-as-dust consolations of humanising idealism. An invincible power is in the world, crushing and crippling man—this is clear and even palpable. The least indiscretion, and the mightiest and the most insignificant alike fall victims to it. One can only deceive oneself about it so long as one knows of it only by

hearsay. But the man who had once been in the iron claws of necessity loses for ever his taste for idealistic self-delusion. No more does he diminish the enemy's power, he will rather exaggerate it. And the pure logical materialism which Von Koren professes gives the most complete expression of our dependence upon the elemental powers of nature. Von Koren's speech has the stroke of a hammer, and each blow strikes not Layevsky but Tchekhov himself on his wounds. He gives more and more strength to Von Koren's arm, he puts himself in the way of his blows. For what reason? Decide as you may. Perhaps Tchekhov cherished a secret hope that self-inflicted torment might be the one road to a new life? He has not told us so. Perhaps he did not know the reason himself, and perhaps he was afraid to offend the positive idealism which held such undisputed sway over contemporary literature. As yet he dared not lift up his voice against the public opinion of Europe—for we do not ourselves invent our philosophical conceptions; they drift down on the wind from Europe! And, to avoid quarrelling with people, he devised a commonplace, happy ending for his terrible story. At the end of the story Layevsky 'reforms': he marries his mistress; gives up his dissolute life; and begins to devote himself to transcribing documents, in order to pay his debts. Normal people can be perfectly satisfied, since normal people read only the last lines of

the fable,—the moral; and the moral of *The Duel* is most wholesome: Layevsky reforms and begins transcribing documents. Of course it may seem that such an ending is more like a gibe at morality; but normal people are not too penetrating psychologists. They are scared of double meanings and, with the 'sincerity' peculiar to themselves, they take every word of the writer for good coin. Good luck to them!

VII

The only philosophy which Tchekhov took seriously, and therefore seriously fought, was positivist materialism—just the positivist materialism, the limited materialism which does not pretend to theoretical completeness. With all his soul Tchekhov felt the awful dependence of a living being upon the invisible but invincible and ostentatiously soulless laws of nature. And materialism, above all scientific materialism, which is reserved and does not hasten in pursuit of the final word, and eschews logical completeness, wholly reduces to the definition of the external conditions of our existence. The experience of every day, every hour, every minute, convinces us that lonely and weak man brought to face with the laws of nature, must always adapt himself and give way, give way, give way. The old professor could not regain his youth; the overstrained Ivanov could not recover his strength; Layevsky could not wash away the

filth with which he was covered—interminable series of implacable, purely materialistic *non possumus*, against which human genius can set nothing but submission or forgetfulness. *Résigne-toi, mon cœur, dors ton sommeil de brute*—we shall find no other words before the pictures which are unfolded in Tchekhov's books. The submission is but an outward show; under it lies concealed a hard, malignant hatred of the unknown enemy. Sleep and oblivion are only seeming. Does a man sleep, does he forget, when he calls his sleep, *sommeil de brute*? But how can he change? The tempestuous protests with which *The Tedious Story* is filled, the need to pour forth the pent-up indignation, soon begin to appear useless, and even insulting to human dignity. Tchekhov's last rebellious work is *Uncle Vanya*. Like the old professor and like Ivanov, Uncle Vanya raises the alarm and makes an incredible pother about his ruined life. He, too, in a voice not his own, fills the stage with his cries: 'Life is over, life is over,'—as though indeed any of these about him, any one in the whole world, could be responsible for his misfortune. But wailing and lamentation is not sufficient for him. He covers his own mother with insults. Aimlessly, like a lunatic, without need or purpose, he begins shooting at his imaginary enemy, Sonya's pitiable and unhappy father. His voice is not enough, he turns to the revolver. He is ready to fire all the cannon on earth, to beat every drum, to ring every bell.

To him it seems that the whole of mankind, the whole of the universe, is sleeping, that the neighbours must be awakened. He is prepared for any extravagance, having no rational way of escape; for to confess at once that there is no escape is beyond the capacity of any man. Then begins a Tchekhov history: 'He cannot reconcile himself, neither can he refuse so to reconcile himself. He can only weep and beat his head against the wall.' Uncle Vanya does it openly, before men's eyes; but how painful to him is the memory of this frank unreserve! When every one has departed after a stupid and painful scene, Uncle Vanya realises that he should have kept silence, that it is no use to confess certain things to any one, not even to one's nearest friend. A stranger's eye cannot endure the sight of hopelessness. 'Your life is over—you have yourself to thank for it: you are a human being no more, all human things are alien to you. Your neighbours are no more neighbours to you, but strangers. You have no right either to help others or to expect help from them. Your destiny is—absolute loneliness.' Little by little Tchekhov becomes convinced of this truth: *Uncle Vanya* is the last trial of loud public protest, of a vigorous 'declaration of rights.' And even in this drama Uncle Vanya is the only one to rage, although there are among the characters Doctor Astrov and poor Sonya, who might also avail themselves of their right to rage, and even to fire the cannon. But they are

silent. They even repeat certain comfortable and angelic words concerning the happy future of mankind; which is to say that their silence is doubly deep, seeing that 'comfortable words' upon the lips of such people are the evidence of their final severance from life: they have left the whole world, and now they admit no one to their presence. They have fenced themselves with comfortable words, as with the Great Wall of China, from the curiosity and attention of their neighbours. Outwardly they resemble all men, therefore no man dares to touch their inward life.

What is the meaning and significance of this straining inward labour in those whose lives are over? Probably Tchekhov would answer this question as Nicolai Stepanovich answered Katy's, with 'I do not know.' He would add nothing. But this life alone, more like to death than life, attracted and engaged him. Therefore his utterance grew softer and slower with every year. Of all our writers Tchekhov has the softest voice. All the energy of his heroes is turned inwards. They create nothing visible; worse, they destroy all things visible by their outward passivity and inertia. A 'positive thinker' like Von Koren brands them with terrible words, and the more content is he with himself and his justice, the more energy he puts into his anathemas. 'Scoundrels, villains, degenerates, degraded animals!'—what did Von Koren not devise to fit the Layevskys? The manifestly positive thinker wants to force Layevsky to tran-

scribe documents. The surreptitiously positive thinkers—idealists and metaphysicians—do not use abusive words. Instead they bury Tchekhov's nerves alive in their idealistic cemeteries, which are called conceptions of the world. Tchekhov himself abstains from the 'solution of the question' with a persistency to which most of the critics probably wished a better fate, and he continues his long stories of men and the life of men, who have nothing to lose, as though the only interest in life were this nightmare suspension between life and death. What does it teach us of life or death? Again we must answer: 'I do not know,'—those words which arouse the greatest aversion in positive thinkers, but appear in some mysterious way to be the permanent elements in the ideas of Tchekhov's people. This is the reason why the philosophy of materialism, though so hostile, is yet so near to them. It contains no answer which can compel man to cheerful submission. It bruises and destroys him, but it does not call itself rational; it does not demand gratitude; it does not demand anything, since it has neither soul nor speech. A man may acknowledge it and hate it. If he manages to get square with it—he is right; if he fails—*vae victis*. How comfortably sounds the voice of the unconcealed ruthlessness of inanimate, impersonal, indifferent nature, compared with the hypocritical and cloying melodies of idealistic, humanistic conceptions of the world! Then again—and this is the chiefest

thing of all—men can struggle with nature still! And in the struggle with nature every weapon is lawful. In the struggle with nature man always remains man, and, therefore, right, whatever means he tries for his salvation, even if he were to refuse to accept the fundamental principle of the world's being—the indestructibility of matter and energy, the law of inertia and the rest—since who will dispute that the most colossal dead force must be subservient to man? But a conception of the world is an utterly different affair! Before uttering a word it puts forward an irreducible demand: man must serve the idea. And this demand is considered not merely as something understood, but as of extraordinary sublimity. Is it strange then that in the choice between idealism and materialism Tchekhov inclined to the latter—the strong but honest adversary? With idealism a man can struggle only by contempt, and Tchekhov's works leave nothing to be desired in this respect. . . . But how shall a man struggle with materialism? And can it be overcome? Perhaps Tchekhov's method may seem strange to my reader, nevertheless it is clear that he came to the conclusion that there was only one way to struggle, to which the prophets of old turned themselves: to beat one's head against the wall. Without thunder or cannon or alarm, in loneliness and silence, remote from their fellows and their fellows' fellows, to gather all the forces of despair for an absurd attempt long since con-

demned by science. Have you any right to expect from Tchekhov an approval of scientific methods? Science has robbed him of everything: he is condemned to create from the void, to an activity of which a normal man, using normal means, is utterly incapable. To achieve the impossible one must first leave the road of routine. However obstinately we may pursue our scientific quests, they will not lead us to the elixir of life. Science began with casting away the longing for human omnipotence as in principle unattainable: her methods are such that success along certain of her paths preclude even seeking along others. In other words, scientific method is defined by the character of the problems which she puts to herself. Indeed, not one of her problems can be solved by beating one's head against the wall. But this method, old-fashioned though it is—I repeat, it was known to the prophets and used by them—promised more to Tchekhov and his nerves than all inductions and deductions (which were not invented by science, but have existed since the beginning of the world). This prompts a man with some mysterious instinct, and appears upon the scene whenever the need of it arises. Science condemns it. But that is nothing strange: it condemns science.

VIII

Now perhaps the further development and direction of Tchekhov's creation will be intelli-

gible, and that peculiar and unique blend in him of sober materialism and fanatical stubbornness in seeking new paths, always round about and hazardous. Like Hamlet, he would dig beneath his opponent a mine one yard deeper, so that he may at one moment blow engineer and engine into the air. His patience and fortitude in this hard, underground toil are amazing and to many intolerable. Everywhere is darkness, not a ray, not a spark, but Tchekhov goes forward, slowly, hardly, hardly moving. . . . An inexperienced or impatient eye will perhaps observe no movement at all. It may be Tchekhov himself does not know for certain whether he is moving forward or marking time. To calculate beforehand is impossible. Impossible even to hope. Man has entered that stage of his existence wherein the cheerful and foreseeing mind refuses its service. It is impossible for him to present to himself a clear and distinct notion of what is going on. Everything takes on a tinge of fantastical absurdity. One believes and disbelieves—everything. In *The Black Monk* Tchekhov tells of a new reality, and in a tone which suggests that he is himself at a loss to say where the reality ends and the phantasmagoria begins. The black monk leads the young scholar into some mysterious remoteness, where the best dreams of mankind shall be realised. The people about call the monk a hallucination and fight him with medicines—drugs, better foods and milk. Kovrin himself does not know who is

right. When he is speaking to the monk, it seems to him that the monk is right; when he sees before him his weeping wife and the serious, anxious faces of the doctors, he confesses that he is under the influence of fixed ideas, which lead him straight to lunacy. Finally the black monk is victorious. Kovrin has not the power to support the banality which surrounds him; he breaks with his wife and her relations, who appear like inquisitors in his eyes, and goes away somewhere—but in our sight he arrives nowhere. At the end of the story he dies in order to give the author the right to make an end. This is always the case: when the author does not know what to do with his hero he kills him. Sooner or later in all probability this habit will be abandoned. In the future, probably, writers will convince themselves and the public that any kind of artificial completion is absolutely superfluous. The matter is exhausted—stop the tale short, even though it be on a half-word. Tchekhov did so sometimes, but only sometimes. In most cases he preferred to satisfy the traditional demands and to supply his readers with an end. This habit is not so unimportant as at first sight it may seem. Consider even *The Black Monk*. The death of the hero is as it were an indication that abnormality must, in Tchekhov's opinion, necessarily lead through an absurd life to an absurd death: but this was hardly Tchekhov's firm conviction. It is clear that he expected something from abnormality, and there-

fore gave no deep attention to men who had left the common track. True, he came to no firm or definite conclusions, for all the tense effort of his creation. He became so firmly convinced that there was no issue from the entangled labyrinth, that the labyrinth with its infinite wanderings, its perpetual hesitations and strayings, its uncaused griefs and joys uncaused—in brief, all things which normal men so fear and shun—became the very essence of his life. Of this and this alone must a man tell. Not of our invention is normal life, nor abnormal. Why then should the first alone be considered as the real reality ?

The Sea-Gull must be considered one of the most characteristic, and therefore one of the most remarkable of Tchekhov's works. Therein the artist's true attitude to life received its most complete expression. Here all the characters are either blind, and afraid to move from their seats in case they lose the way home, or half-mad, struggling and tossing about to no end nor purpose. Arkadzina the famous actress clings with her teeth to her seventy thousand roubles, her fame, and her last lover. Tregovin the famous writer writes day in, day out ; he writes and writes, knowing neither end nor aim. People read his works and praise them, but he is not his own master ; like Marko, the ferryman in the tale, he labours on without taking his hand from the oar, carrying passengers from one bank to the other. The boat, the passengers, and the river too, bore him to death. But how can he get rid

of them? He might give the oars over to the first-comer: the solution is simple, but after it, as in the tale, he must go to heaven. Not Tregovin alone, but all the people in Tchekhov's books who are no longer young remind one of Marko the ferryman. It is plain that they dislike their work, but, exactly as though they were hypnotised, they cannot break away from the influence of the alien power. The monotonous, even dismal, rhythm of life has lulled their consciousness and will to sleep. Everywhere Tchekhov underlines this strange and mysterious trait of human life. His people always speak, always think, always do one and the same thing. One builds houses according to a plan made once for all (*My Life*); another goes on his round of visits from morn to night, collecting roubles (*Yonitch*); a third is always buying up houses (*Three Years*). Even the language of his characters is deliberately monotonous. They are all monotonous, to the point of stupidity, and they are all afraid to break the monotony, as though it were the source of extraordinary joys. Read Tregovin's monologue:

'. . . Let us talk. . . . Let us talk of my beautiful life. . . . What shall I begin with? [Musing a little.] . . . There are such things as fixed ideas, when a person thinks day and night, for instance, of the moon, always of the moon. I too have my moon. Day and night I am at the mercy of one besetting idea: "I must write, I must write, I must." I have

hardly finished one story than, for some reason or other, I must write a second, then a third, and after the third, a fourth. I write incessantly, post-haste. I cannot do otherwise. Where then, I ask you, is beauty and serenity? What a monstrous life it is! I am sitting with you now, I am excited, but meanwhile every second I remember that an unfinished story is waiting for me. I see a cloud, like a grand piano. It smells of heliotrope. I say to myself: a sickly smell, a half-mourning colour. . . . I must not forget to use these words when describing a summer evening. I catch up myself and you on every phrase, on every word, and hurry to lock all these words and phrases into my literary storehouse. Perhaps they will be useful. When I finish work I run to the theatre, or go off fishing: at last I shall rest, forget myself. But no! a heavy ball of iron is dragging on my fetters,—a new subject, which draws me to the desk, and I must make haste to write and write again. And so on for ever, for ever. I have no rest from myself, and I feel that I am eating away my own life. I feel that the honey which I give to others has been made of the pollen of my most precious flowers, that I have plucked the flowers themselves and trampled them down to the roots. Surely, I am mad. Do my neighbours and friends treat me as a sane person? "What are you writing? What have you got ready for us?" The same thing, the same thing eternally, and it seems to me that the attention,

the praise, the enthusiasm of my friends is all a fraud. I am being robbed like a sick man, and sometimes I am afraid that they will creep up to me and seize me, and put me away in an asylum.'

But why these torments? Throw up the oars and begin a new life. *Impossible.* While no answer comes down from heaven, Tregovin will not throw up the oars, will not begin a new life. In Tchekhov's work, only young, very young and inexperienced people speak of a new life. They are always dreaming of happiness, regeneration, light, joy. They fly headlong into the flame, and are burned like silly butterflies. In *The Sea-Gull*, Nina Zaryechnaya and Trepliev, in other works other heroes, men and women alike — all are seeking for something, yearning for something, but not one of them does that which he desires. Each one lives in isolation; each is wholly absorbed in his life, and is indifferent to the lives of others. And the strange fate of Tchekhov's heroes is that they strain to the last limit of their inward powers, but there are no visible results at all. They are all pitiable. The woman takes snuff, dresses slovenly, wears her hair loose, is uninteresting. The man is irritable, grumbling, takes to drink, bores every one about him. They act, they speak—always out of season. They cannot, I would even say they do not want to, adapt the outer world to themselves. Matter and energy unite according to their own laws—people live according to their own, as though

matter and energy had no existence at all. In this Tchekhov's intellectuals do not differ from illiterate peasants and the half-educated bourgeois. Life in the manor is the same as in the valley farm, the same as in the village. Not one believes that by changing his outward conditions he would change his fate as well. Everywhere reigns an unconscious but deep and ineradicable conviction that our will must be directed towards ends which have nothing in common with the organised life of mankind. Worse still, the organisation appears to be the enemy of the will and of man. One must spoil, devour, destroy, ruin. To think out things quietly, to anticipate the future—that is impossible. One must beat one's head, beat one's head eternally against the wall. And to what purpose? Is there any purpose at all? Is it a beginning or an end? Is it possible to see in it the warrant of a new and inhuman creation, a creation out of the void? 'I do not know' was the old professor's answer to Katy. 'I do not know' was Tchekhov's answer to the sobs of those tormented unto death. With these words, and only these, can an essay upon Tchekhov end. *Résigne-toi, mon cœur, dors ton sommeil de brute.*

THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

(For the twenty-fifth anniversary of F. M. Dostoevsky's death.)

I

Vladimir Soloviev used to call Dostoevsky 'the prophet,' and even 'the prophet of God.' Immediately after Soloviev, though often in complete independence of him, very many people looked upon Dostoevsky as the man to whom the books of human destiny were opened; and this happened not only after his death, but even while he was yet alive. Apparently Dostoevsky himself too, if he did not regard himself as a prophet—he was too eagle-eyed for that—at least thought it right that all people should see a prophet in him. To this bears witness the tone of *The Journal of an Author*, no less than the questions upon which he generally touches therein. *The Journal of an Author* began to appear in 1873, that is on Dostoevsky's return from abroad, and therefore coincides with what his biographers call 'the highest period of his life.' Dostoevsky was then the happy father of a family, a man of secure position, a famous writer, the author of a whole series of novels known to all: *The House of the Dead*, *The Idiot*,

The Possessed. He has everything which can be required *from* life, or, more truly, he has taken everything which can be taken from life. You remember Tolstoi's deliberations in his *Confession*? 'Finally, I shall be as famous as Pushkin, Gogol, Goethe and Shakespeare—and what shall come after?' Indeed, it is difficult to become a more famous writer than Shakespeare; and even if one succeeded, the inevitable question, 'And what shall come after?' would by no means be removed. Sooner or later in the activity of a great writer a moment comes when further perfection seems impossible. How shall a man be greater than himself in the world of literature? If he would move, then by his own will or in spite of it he must step on to another plane. And this is plainly the beginning of prophecy in a writer. In the general view the prophet is greater than the writer; and even the possession of genius is not always a guarantee against the general view. Even men so sceptical as Tolstoi and Dostoevsky, men always ready to doubt everything, more than once were the victims of prejudices. Prophetic words were expected of them, and they went out to meet men's desires, Dostoevsky even more readily than Tolstoi. Moreover both prophesied clumsily: they promised one thing, and something wholly different happened. So Tolstoi promised long ago that men would awake to their error soon and would put away from them fratricidal war, and would begin to live as true Christians should,

fulfilling the Gospel commandment of love. Tolstoi prophesied and preached; people read him, as, it seems, they read no other writer: but they have not changed their habits nor their tastes. For the last ten years Tolstoi has perforce been a witness of a whole series of horrible and most savage wars. And now there is our present revolution [1]—armed mobs rioting, the gallows set up, men shot down, bombs—the revolution which came to replace the bloody war in the Far East!

And this is in Russia, where Tolstoi was born, lived, taught and prophesied, where millions of people sincerely hold him to be the greatest genius of all! Even in his own family Tolstoi could not effect the change that he desired. One of his sons is an officer in the army; the other writes in the *Novoie Vremya*, as though he were Souvorin's [2] son, not Tolstoi's. . . . Where, then, is the gift of prophecy? Why is it that a man so great as Tolstoi can foresee nothing, and seems to peer his way through life? 'What will to-morrow bring forth?' 'To-morrow I 'll work miracles,' said the magician to the Russian prince of old. For reply the prince drew his sword and struck off the magician's head; and the excited mob, which believed in the magician-prophet, became calm and departed home. History is ever striking off the heads of prophetic predictions, and yet the crowd still runs after

[1] This essay was written during the revolution of 1905.
[2] The famous editor of the *Novoie Vremya*.

the prophets. Of little faith, the crowd looks for a sign, because it desires a miracle. But can the ability to predict be accounted as evidence of the power to work miracles? It is possible to predict an eclipse of the sun or the appearance of a comet, but this surely means a miracle only to the ignorant. An enlightened mind is secure in the knowledge that where prediction is possible, there is no miracle, since the possibility of prediction and of foreseeing presupposes a strict uniformity. Therefore not he will appear a prophet who has great spiritual gifts, nor he who desires to dominate the world and to command the very laws, neither the magician, nor the sorcerer, nor the artist, but he who, having yielded himself beforehand to the actual and its laws, has devoted himself to the mechanical labour of record and calculation. Bismarck could foretell the greatness of Russia and Germany; and not only Bismarck, but an ordinary German politician, for whom everything is reduced to *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles*, could read the future for many years ahead; yet Dostoevsky and Tolstoi could foresee nothing. In Dostoevsky the failure is still more remarkable than in Tolstoi, because he more often attempted prediction: more than half of his *Journal* consists in unfulfilled prophecies. So often did he commit his prophetic genius.

II

To some it may perhaps seem out of place that in an article devoted to the twenty-fifth anniversary of the writer's death, I call to mind his mistakes and errors. The reproach is hardly just. A certain kind of defect in a great man is at least as characteristic and important as his qualities.

Dostoevsky was not a Bismarck. But is that so terrible that we must lament it? Moreover, for writers of the type of Tolstoi and Dostoevsky, their social and political ideas are without any value. They know well that no one obeys them. Whatever they may say, history and political life will go on in the same way, since it is not their books and articles which guide events. And, probably, here is the explanation of the amazing boldness of their opinions. If Tolstoi really imagined that it would be enough for him to write an article demanding that all 'soldiers, policemen, judges, ministers' and the rest, all those guardians of the public peace, whom he detested—and, by the way, who loves them?—should be dismissed, for all prison-doors to be flung wide before the murderers and robbers—who can tell whether he would have shown himself sufficiently firm and resolute in his opinions, to take upon himself the responsibility for the effects of the measures which he proposed? But he knows beyond all doubt that he will not be obeyed, and therefore he calmly preaches

anarchy. Dostoevsky's part as a preacher was quite different; but it too was, so to speak, platonic. Probably it came as a surprise even to himself, that he became the prophet, not of 'ideal' politics, but of those most realistic tasks which governments always set themselves in countries where a few men direct the destinies of peoples. Listening to Dostoevsky, one may imagine that he is discovering ideas which the government must take for its guidance and set itself to realise. But you will soon convince yourself that Dostoevsky did not discover one single original political idea. Everything of the kind that he possessed he had borrowed without examination from the Slavophiles, who in their turn appeared original only to the extent to which they were able without outside assistance to translate from the German and the French: *Russland, Russland über alles.* (Even the rhythm of the verse is not affected by the substitution of the one word.) But what is most important is, that the Slavophiles with their Russo-German glorification of nationality, and with them Dostoevsky who joined the chorus, have neither taught nor educated one single man among the ruling classes. Our government knew all that it needed to know by itself, without the Slavophiles and without Dostoevsky. From time immemorial it had gone its way by the road which the theorists so passionately praised: so that nothing was left to them but to eulogise those in power and to defend the policy of the

Russian government against the public opinion which was hostile to it. Autocracy, Orthodoxy, Nationality—all these were held so firmly in Russia that in the 'seventies when Dostoevsky began to preach they needed no support whatever. And surely every one knows that power never seriously reckons upon the help of literature. Certainly it requires that the Muses should pay tribute to it with the others, nobly formulating its demands in the words: *Blessed be the union of the sword and the lyre.* It used to happen that the Muses did not refuse the request, sometimes sincerely, sometimes because, as Heine said, it is particularly disagreeable to wear iron chains in Russia, on account of the heavy frosts. In any case the Muses were only allowed to sing the praises of the sword, but by no means to wield it. There are all kinds of unions. And here again Dostoevsky, for all his independent nature, still appeared in the rôle of a prophet of the Russian government: that is, he divined the secret devices of the powers that were, and in this connection then recalled all the 'high and beautiful' words which he had managed to hoard up in the course of his long wanderings. For instance, the government began to cast covetous glances towards the East (at that time the Near East still); Dostoevsky begins to argue that we must have Constantinople, and to prophesy that Constantinople will soon be ours. His 'argument' is, of course, of a purely 'moral character,' and, sure enough,

he is a writer. Only from Constantinople, he says, can we make avail the purely Russian ideal of embracing all humanity. Of course our government, though indeed we had no Bismarcks, perfectly well understood the value of moral argument and of prophecy based upon them, and would have preferred a few well-equipped divisions and improved guns. To realist politicians one single soldier, armed not with a gun but with a blunderbuss, is of more importance than the sublimest conception of moral philosophy. But still they do not drive away the humble prophet, if the prophet knows his place. Dostoevsky accepted the rôle, since it gave him still the opportunity of displaying his refractory nature in the struggle with Liberal literature. He sang pæans, made protests, uttered absurdities—and worse than absurdities. For instance, he counselled all the Slav peoples to unite under the ægis of Russia, assuring them that only thus would full independence be guaranteed them, and the right of shaping themselves by their own culture, and so on—and that in the face of the millions of Polish Slavs living in Russia. Or again, the *Moscow Gazette* gives its opinion that it would be well for the Crimean Tartars to emigrate to Turkey, since it would then be possible for Russians to settle in the peninsula. Dostoevsky catches up this original idea with enthusiasm. 'Indeed,' he says, 'on political and state and similar considerations' —I do not know how it is with other people, but

when I hear such words as 'state' and 'political' on Dostoevsky's lips, I cannot help smiling—'it is necessary to expel the Tartars and to settle Russians on their lands.' When the *Moscow Gazette* projects such a measure, it is intelligible. But Dostoevsky! Dostoevsky who called himself a Christian, who so passionately preaches love to one's neighbour, self-abasement, self-renunciation, who taught that Russia must 'serve the nations'—how could he be taken with an idea so rapacious? And indeed almost all his political ideas have the mark of rapacity upon them: to grab and grab, and still to grab. . . . As the occasion demands, he now expresses the hope that we may have Germany's friendship, and again threatens her; now he argues that we have need of England, and again he asserts that we could do without her,—just like a leader-writer in a *bien-pensant* provincial paper. One thing alone makes itself felt among all these ludicrous and eternally contradictory assertions,—Dostoevsky understands nothing, absolutely nothing, about politics, and moreover, he has nothing at all to do with politics. He is forced to go in tow of others who, compared with him, are utter nonentities, and he goes. Even his ambition—and he had a colossal ambition, an ambition unique in its kind, as befitted a universal man—suffers not one whit: chiefly because men expected prophecy from him, because the next title to that of a great writer is that of a prophet, and because a ring

of conviction and a loud voice are the signs of the prophetic gift. Dostoevsky could speak aloud : he could also speak with the tone of one who knows secrets, and of one with authority. One learns much in the underworld. All these things served him. Men took the poet-laureate of the existing order for the inspirer of thoughts and the governor of Russia's remotest destinies. It was enough for Dostoevsky. It was even necessary for Dostoevsky. He knew of course that he was no prophet ; but he knew that there had never been one on earth, and that those who were prophets had no better right to the title than he.

III

I will permit myself to remind the reader of Tolstoi's letter to his son, lately published by the latter in the newspapers. It is very interesting. Once more, not from the standpoint of the practical man who has to decide the questions of the day—from this standpoint Tolstoi, Dostoevsky, and their similars are quite useless—but man does not live by bread alone.

Even now in the terrible days through which we have to live, now, if you will, more than ever before, one cannot read newspapers alone, nor think only of the awful surprises which tomorrow prepares for us. To every one is left an hour of leisure between the reading of newspapers and party programmes, if it be not an hour in the day when the noise of events and the

pressure of immediate work distracts, then an hour in the deep night, when everything that was possible has been already done, and everything that was required has been said. Then come flying in the old thoughts and questions, frightened away by business, and for the thousandth time one returns to the mystery of human genius and human greatness. Where and how far can genius know and accomplish more than ordinary men ?

Then Tolstoi's letter, which during the day aroused only anger and indignation,—is it not outrageous and revolting, think some, that in the great collision of forces which contend with one another in Russia, Tolstoi cannot distinguish the right force from the wrong, but stigmatises all the struggling combatants by the one name of ungodly ? During the day, I say, it is surely outrageous: in the daytime we would like Tolstoi to be with us and for us, because we are convinced that we and we alone are seeking the truth, nay, that we know the truth, while our enemies are defending evil and falsehood, whether in malice or in ignorance. But this is during the day. In the night-time, things are changed. One remembers that Goethe also overlooked, simply did not notice, the great French Revolution. True, he was a German who lived far from Paris, while Tolstoi lives close to Moscow, where men, women, and children have been shot, cut down, and burnt alive. Moreover, there is no doubt that Tolstoi has overlooked not merely Moscow,

but everything that went before Moscow. What is happening now does not seem to him important or extraordinary. For him only that is important to which he, Tolstoi, has set his hand: all that occurs outside and beside him, for him has no existence. This is the great prerogative of great men. And sometimes it seems to me—perhaps it is only that I would have it seem so—as though there were in that prerogative a deep and hidden meaning.

When we have no more strength in us to listen to the endless tales of horrible atrocities which have already been committed, and to anticipate in imagination all that the future holds in store for us, then we recall Tolstoi and his indifference. It is not in our human power to return the murdered fathers and mothers to the children nor the children to their fathers and mothers. Nor stands it even in our power to revenge ourselves upon the murderers, nor will vengeance reconcile every one to his loss. And we try no longer to think with logic, and to seek a justification of the horrors there where there is and can be none. What if we ask ourselves whether Tolstoi and Goethe did not see the Revolution and did not suffer its pains, only because they saw something else, something, it may even be, more necessary and important? Maybe there are indeed more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy.

Now we may return to Dostoevsky and his 'ideas'; we may call them fearlessly by the

names which they deserve, for though Dostoevsky is a writer of genius, this does not mean that we must forget our daily needs. The night and the day have each their rights. Dostoevsky wanted to be a prophet, he wanted people to listen to him and cry 'Hosanna!' because, I say again, he thought that if men had ever cried 'Hosanna!' to any one, then there was no reason why he, Dostoevsky, should be denied the honour. That is the reason why in the 'seventies he made his appearance in the new rôle of a preacher of Christianity, and not of Christianity merely, but of orthodoxy.

Again, I would draw attention to the far from accidental circumstances that his preaching coincided with the 'serenest' period of his life. He who had in time past been a homeless wanderer, a poor man who had not where to lay his head, had provided himself with a family and a house of his own, even with money (for his wife was saving). The failure had become a celebrity; the convict a full citizen. The underworld, whereinto his fate had but lately driven him, it might seem for ever, now appeared to him a phantasmagoria which never had been real. In the galleys and the underworld had been born within him a great hunger for God which lived long; there he fought a great fight, the fight of life against death; there for the first time were made the new and awful experiments which allied Dostoevsky with everything that is rebellious and restless on earth. What Dosto-

evsky wrote during the closing years of his life (not merely *The Journal of an Author*, but *The Brothers Karamazov* as well) has value only in so far as Dostoevsky's *past* is reflected therein. He made no new step onwards. As he was, so he remained, on the eve of a great truth. But in the old days that did not suffice him, he hungered for something beyond; but now he does not want to struggle, and he cannot explain to himself or to others what is really happening within him. He pretends to be struggling still, nay, more, he behaves as though he had won the final victory, and demands that his triumph should be acknowledged by public opinion. He loves to think that the night is already past and the actual day begun: and the galleys and the underworld, reminding him that the day is not yet, are no more. All the evidences of a complete illusion of victory seem to be there—let him only choose the text and preach! Dostoevsky clutched at orthodoxy. Why not Christianity? Because Christianity is not for him who has a house, a family, money, fame, and a fatherland. Christ said: 'Let him leave all that he hath and follow me.' But Dostoevsky was afraid of solitude, he desired to be the prophet of modern, settled men to whom pure Christianity, unadapted to the needs of civilised existence in a governed state, is unfitted. How should a Christian seize Constantinople, drive out the Tartars from the Crimea, reduce all Slavs to the condition of the Poles, and the rest—for all the

projects of Dostoevsky and the *Moscow Gazette* defy enumeration? So, before accepting the Gospel, he must explain it. . . .

However strange it may appear, it must be confessed that one cannot find in the whole of literature a single man who is prepared to accept the Gospel as a whole, without interpretation. One man wants to seize Constantinople according to the Gospel, another to justify the existing order, a third to exalt himself or to thrust down his enemy; and each considers it as his right to diminish from, or even to supplement, the text of Holy Writ. I have, of course, only those in view who acknowledge, at least in word, the divine origin of the New Testament; since he who sees in the Gospel only one of the more or less remarkable books of his library, naturally has the right to subject it to whatever critical operations he may choose.

But here we have Tolstoi, Dostoevsky, and Vladimir Soloviev. It is generally believed, and the belief is particularly supported and developed by the most recent criticism, that Tolstoi alone rationalised Christianity, while Dostoevsky and Soloviev accepted it in all the fullness of its mysticism, denying reason the right to separate truth from falsehood in the Gospel. I consider this belief mistaken: for Dostoevsky and Soloviev were afraid to accept the Gospel as the fountain of knowledge, and relied much more upon their own reason and their experience of life than upon the words of

Christ. But, if there was a man among us who, though but in part, took the risk of accepting the mysterious and obviously dangerous words of the Gospel precepts, that man was Leo Tolstoi. I will explain myself.

We are told that Tolstoi made the attempt, in his works published abroad, to explain the miracles of the Gospel in a way intelligible to human reason. Dostoevsky and Soloviev, on the other hand, readily accepted the inexplicable. But generally the miracles of the Gospel attract the people who believe least, for it is impossible to repeat the miracles, and this being so, then it follows that a merely external faith is sufficient, a mere verbal assertion. A man says that he believes in miracles: his reputation as a religious man is made, both in his own mind and in others', and as for the rest of the Gospel, there remains 'interpretation.' Consider, for instance, the doctrine of non-resistance to evil. It need not be said that the doctrine of non-resistance is the most terrible, and the most irrational, and mysterious thing that we read in the Gospel. All our reasoning soul is indignant at the thought that full material freedom should be given to the murderer to accomplish his murderous acts. How can you allow a murderer to kill an innocent child before your very eyes, and yet not draw the sword? Who has the right to give that abominable precept? Soloviev[1] and Dostoevsky alike repeat that question, the one in a disguised, the other in an open attack on Tolstoi. Yet

[1] *War and Christianity,* by Vladimir Soloviev.

since the Gospel plainly declares 'Resist not evil,' both of our believers in miracles have suddenly remembered reason and turned to its testimony, knowing that reason will naturally destroy any meaning whatever that may be in the precept. In other words, they repeat the question of the doubting Jews concerning Christ: 'Who is He that speaketh as one having authority?' God commanded Abraham that he should offer up his son. By his reason, his human reason, Abraham refused to acknowledge any intelligible meaning in the cruel command, but yet made ready to act according to the word of God and made no attempt to rid himself of the hard and inhuman obligation by cunning interpretation. But Dostoevsky and Soloviev refuse to fulfil Christ's demands so soon as they find no justification in the human reason. Yet they say that they believe that Lazarus was raised from the dead and that the man who was sick of a palsy was cured, and all the other miracles which are related by the Apostles. Why then does their belief end just at the point where it begins to place obligations upon them? Why the sudden recourse to reason, when we know exactly that Dostoevsky came to the Gospels only to be rid of the power of reason? But that was in the days of the underworld. Now the 'serene' period of his life has begun. But Soloviev, evidently, had never even known the underworld. Only Tolstoi boldly and resolutely tries to test the truth of the Christian teaching, not in his thoughts alone, but in part in his life also. From the human point of

view it is mad to make no resistance to evil. He knows that every whit as well as Dostoevsky, Soloviev and the rest of his many opponents. But he is really seeking in the Gospels that divine madness, since human reason does not satisfy him. Tolstoi began to follow the Gospel in that clouded period of his life when he was haunted by the phantoms of Ivan Ilyich and Pozdnyshiev. Here belief in miracles, belief in the abstract, divorced from life, avails nothing. For belief's sake one must surrender all that is dearest—even a son—to the sacrifice. Who is He that spake as one having authority? We cannot now verify whether He did in truth raise Lazarus from the dead, or satisfy thousands with a few handfuls of loaves. But if we unhesitatingly perform His precepts, then we may discover whether He has given us the truth. . . . So it was with Tolstoi; and he turned to the Gospel which is the sole and original source of Christianity. But Dostoevsky turned to the Slavophiles and the teachings of their state-religion. Orthodoxy infallible, not Catholicism nor Protestantism nor even simple Christianity; and then, the original idea: *Russland, Russland über alles.* Tolstoi could prophesy nothing in history, but then, as if deliberately, he does not interfere with the historical life. For him our present reality does not exist: he concentrates himself wholly upon the riddle which God set Abraham. But Dostoevsky desired at all costs to prophesy, prophesied constantly and was constantly mis-

taken. We have not taken Constantinople, we have not united the Slavs, and even the Tartars still live in the Crimea. He terrified us by prophesying that Europe would be drenched in rivers of blood because of the warfare between the classes, while in Russia, thanks to our Russian ideal of universal humanity, not only would our internal problems be peacefully solved, but a new unheard-of word would still be found whereby we should save hapless Europe. A quarter of a century has passed. So far nothing has happened in Europe. But we are drowning ourselves, literally drowning ourselves, with blood. Not only is our alien population oppressed, Slav and non-Slav alike, but our own brother is tortured, the miserable starving Russian peasant who understands nothing at all. In Moscow, in the heart of Russia, women, children, and old men have been shot down. Where now is the Russian universal soul of which Dostoevsky prophesied in his speech on Pushkin? Where is love, where are the Christian precepts? We see only 'Governmentalism,' over which the Western nations also fought; but they fought with means less cruel and less hostile to civilisation. Russia will again have to learn from the West as she had to learn more than once before. And Dostoevsky would have done far better had he never attempted to prophesy.

But there is no great harm done even if he did prophesy. I am glad with all my heart even

now that he rested a little while from the galleys at the end of his life. I am deeply convinced that even had he remained in the underworld until the day of his death, yet he would have found no solution of the questions which tormented him. However much energy of soul a man puts into his work, he will still remain 'on the eve' of truth, and will not find the solution he desires. That is the law of human kind. And Dostoevsky's preaching has done no harm. Those listened to him who, even without his voice, would have marched on Constantinople, oppressed the Poles, and made ready the sufferings which are necessary to the soul of the peasant. Though Dostoevsky gave them his sanction, on the whole he adds nothing to them. They had no need of literary sanction, quite correctly judging that in practical matters not the printed page, but bayonets and artillery are of deciding value.

All that he had to tell, Dostoevsky told us in his novels, which even now, twenty-five years after his death, attract all those who would wrest from life her secrets. And the title of prophet, which he sought so diligently, considering that it was his by right, did not suit him at all. Prophets are Bismarcks, but they are Chancellors too. The first in the village is the first in Rome. . . . Is a Dostoevsky doomed eternally to be 'on the eve'? Let us once more try to reject logic, this time perhaps not logic alone, and say: 'So let it be.'

PENULTIMATE WORDS

PENULTIMATE WORDS

I

De omnibus dubitandum

THERE are but few orthodox Hegelians left among philosophers nowadays, yet Hegel is still supreme over the minds of our contemporaries. It may even be that certain of his ideas have taken deeper root nowadays than when Hegelianism was in full bloom: for instance, the conception that history is the unfolding of the idea in reality, or, to put it more briefly and in terms more familiar to the modern mind—the idea of progress. Try to convince an educated person of the contrary: you are sure to be worsted. But, *de omnibus dubitandum*, which means in other words, that doubt is called upon to fulfil its mission above all in those cases where a conviction is particularly strong and unshakable. Therefore one must admit, whether he will or no, that progress so called—the development of mankind in time—is a fiction.

We have wireless telegraphy, radium and the rest, yet we stand no higher than the Romans or the Greeks of old. You admit this? Then, one step further: although we have wireless

telegraphy and all the other blessings of civilisation, still we stand no higher than red- or black-skinned savages. You protest: but the principle compels. You began to doubt: then what is the use of drawing back?

For myself, I must confess that the idea of the spiritual perfection of savages entered my mind but lately, when, for the first time for many years, I looked through the works of Tylor, Lubbock and Spencer. They speak with such certainty of the advantages of our spiritual organisation, and have such sincere contempt for the moral misery of the savage, that in spite of myself stole in the thought: Is it not exactly here, where all are so certain that no one ever examines the question, that the source of error is to be found? High time to recall Descartes and his rule! And as soon as I began to doubt, all my former certainty—of course I fully shared the opinion of the English anthropologists—disappeared in a moment. . . . It began to appear that the savage indeed is higher and more important than our savants, and not our materialists only, as Professor Paulsen thinks, but our idealists, metaphysicians, mystics, and even our convinced missionaries (sincere believers, not the profit-mongering sort), whom Europe sends forth into the world to enlighten the backward brethren. It seemed to me that the credit transactions common among savages, with a promise to pay in the world beyond the grave, have a deep meaning. And human sacrifices!

In them Spencer sees a barbarity, as an educated European should. I also see in them barbarity, because I also am a European and have a scientific education. But I deeply envy their barbarity, and curse the cultivation which has herded me together with believing missionaries, idealist, materialist, and positivist philosophers, into the narrow fold of the sultry and disgusting apprehensible world. We may write books to prove the immortality of the soul, but our wives won't follow us to the other world: they will prefer to endure the widow's lot here on the earth. Our morality, based on religion, forbids us to hurry into eternity. And so in everything. We are guessing, at the best we are sicklied with dreams, but our life passes outside our guesses and our dreams. One man still accepts the rites of the Church, however strange they may be, and seriously imagines that he is brought into contact with other worlds. Beyond the rites no step is taken. Kant died when he was eighty; had it not been for cholera, Hegel would have lived a hundred years; while the savages—the young ones kill the old and . . . I dare not complete the sentence for fear of offending sensitive ears. Again I recall Descartes and his rule: who is right, the savages or we? And if the savages are right, can history be the unfolding of the idea? And is not the conception of progress in time (that is the development from the past to the present and to the future) the purest error?

Perhaps, and most probably, there is development, but the direction of this development is in a line perpendicular to the line of time. The base of the perpendicular may be any human personality. May God and the reader forgive one the obscurity of the last words. I hope the clarity of the foregoing exposition will to some extent atone for it.

II

Self-renunciation and Megalomania

We are obliged to think that nothing certain can be said either of self-renunciation or of megalomania, though each one of us in his own experience knows something of the former as well as of the latter. But it is well known that the impossibility of solving a question never yet kept people from reflecting. On the contrary: to us the most alluring questions are those to which there is no actual, no universally valid, answer. I hope that sooner or later, philosophy will be thus defined, in contrast to science:—philosophy is the teaching of truths which are binding on none. Thereby the accusation so often made against philosophy will be removed, that philosophy properly consists of a series of mutually exclusive opinions. This is true, but she must be praised for it, not blamed: there is nothing bad in it, but good, a very great deal of good. On the other hand, it is bad,

extremely bad, that science should consist of truths universally binding. For every obligation is a constraint. Temporarily, one can submit to a restraint, put on a corset, fetters; one can agree to anything temporarily. But who will voluntarily admit the mastery over himself of an eternal law? Even from the quiet and clear Spinoza I sometimes hear a deep sigh, and I think that he is longing for freedom—he who wasted all his life, all his genius in the glorification of necessity. . . . With such an introduction one may say what he pleases.

It seems to me that self-renunciation and megalomania, however little they resemble one another apparently, may be observed successively, even simultaneously, in one and the same person. The ascetic, who has denied life and humbles himself before everybody, and the madman (like Nietzsche or Dostoevsky), who affirms that he is the light, the salt of the earth, the first in the whole world or even in the whole universe—both reach their madness—I hope there is no necessity to demonstrate that self-renunciation as well as megalomania is a kind of madness—under conditions for the most part identical. The world does not satisfy the man and he begins to seek for a better. All serious seeking brings a man to lonely paths, and lonely paths, it is well known, end in a great wall which sets a fatal bound to man's curiosity. Then arises the question, how shall a man pass beyond the wall, by overcoming either the law

of impenetrability or the equally invincible law of gravity, in other words, how shall a man become infinitely small or infinitely great? The first way is that of self-renunciation: I want nothing, I myself am nothing, I am infinitely small, and therefore I can pass through the infinitely small pores of the wall.

The other way is megalomania. I am infinitely strong, infinitely great, I can do all things, I can shatter the wall, I can step over it, though it be higher than all the mountains of the earth and though it has hitherto dismayed the strongest and the bravest. This is probably the origin of the two most mysterious and mighty spiritual transformations. There is no single religion upon which are not more or less clearly impressed the traces of these methods of man's struggle with the poverty of his powers. In ascetic religions the tendency to self-renunciation predominates: Buddhism glorifies the suppression of the individual and has for its ideal Nirvana. The Greeks dreamed of Titans and heroes. The Jews consider themselves the chosen people and await the Messiah. As for the Gospel, it is hard to say to which method of struggle it gives the preference. On the one hand are the great miracles, the raising from the dead, the healing of the sick, the power over the winds and the sea; on the other: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' The Son of God who will sit on the right hand of power now lives in the company of publicans, beggars, and harlots, and serves

them. 'Who is not for us, is against us'; the promise to thrust down his enemies into the fiery hell; eternal torment for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and equal with these the exhortation to the extreme of humility and love to the enemy: 'Turn to him the other cheek also.' Throughout, the Gospel is permeated with contradictions, which are not extraneous and historical, concerned with facts, but intrinsic, contradictions of mood, of 'ideals,' as the modern man would say. What is in one chapter praised as the noblest task is in the next degraded to an unworthy labour. It is in no way strange that the most opposite teachings should find justification in this little book, which is half composed of repetitions. The Inquisitors, the Jesuits, and the old ascetics called themselves Christians; so do the modern Protestants and our Russian sectaries. To a greater or less degree they all are right, even the Protestants. Such contradictory elements are intertwined in the Gospel, that men, above all those who travel the high road, who can move in one direction only, and under one conspicuous flag, who have become accustomed to believe in the unity of reason and the infallibility of logical laws, could never fully grasp the teaching of the Gospel, and always aspired to give to the words and deeds of Christ a uniform explanation which should exclude contradictions, and more or less correspond to the common conceptions of the work and problems of life. They read in the mysterious book, 'Have

faith and thou shalt say to this mountain: be thou removed,' and understood it to mean that always, every hour and every minute, one must think and desire the self-same thing, prescribed beforehand and fully defined; whereas in these words the Gospel allows and commends the maddest and most perilous experiments. That which is, did not exist for Christ; and only that existed, which is not.

The old Roman, Pilate, who was apparently an educated man, clever and not bad at heart, though weak in character, could neither understand nor elucidate the cause of the strange struggle which took place before him. With his whole heart he pitied the pale Jew before him, who was guilty of nothing. 'What is truth?' he asked Christ. Christ did not answer him, nor could He answer, not through ignorance, as the heathen desired to believe, but because that question cannot be answered in words. It would have been necessary to take Pilate's head, and turn it towards the other side, in order that he might see what he had never seen before. Or, still better; to have used the method to which the hunch-backed pony turns in the fairy tale, in order to change sleepy Ivanushka into a wizard and a beauty: first, to plunge him into a cauldron of boiling milk, then into another of boiling water, then a third of ice-cold water. There is every reason to suppose that with this preliminary preparation Pilate would have begun to act differently, and I think the hunch-backed

pony would agree that self-renunciation and megalomania would be a fair substitute for the cauldrons of the tale.

Great privations and great illusions so change the nature of man that things which seemed before impossible, become possible, and the unattainable, attainable.

III

Eternal Truths

In the *Memorabilia* Xenophon tells of the meeting of Socrates with the famous sophist Hippias. When Hippias came to Socrates, the latter as usual held forth, and as usual asked why it is that men who wish to learn carpentry or smith's work know to whom they should apply, but if they desire to learn virtue, cannot possibly find a teacher. Hippias, who had heard these opinions of Socrates many times before, remarked ironically: 'So you 're still saying the same old things, that I heard from you years ago!' Socrates understood and accepted the challenge, as he always accepted challenges of this kind. A dispute began, by which it was demonstrated (as usual in Plato and Xenophon) that Socrates was a stronger dialectician than his opponent. He succeeded in showing that his conception of justice was based on the same firm foundation as all his other conceptions, and that convictions once formed, if they are true, are as little liable to the action of time as noble metals to rust.

Socrates lived seventy years. He was once a youth, once a man, once a greybeard. But what if he had lived a hundred and forty years, experienced once again all the three seasons of life, and had again met Hippias? Or, better still, if the soul, as Socrates taught, is immortal and Socrates now lives somewhere in the moon or Sirius, or in any other place predestined for immortal souls, does he really go on plaguing his companions with discourses on justice, carpenters, and smiths? And does he still emerge victorious as of old from the dispute with Hippias and other persons who dare to affirm that everything (human convictions included) may be, and ought to be, subject to the laws of time, and that mankind not only loses nothing, but gains much by such subjection?

IV

Earth and Heaven

The word justice is on all men's lips. But do men indeed so highly prize justice as one would think, who believed all that has been said and is still being said concerning it? More than this, is it so highly appreciated by its sworn advocates and panegyrists—poets, philosophers, moralists, theologians—even by the best of them, the most sincere and gifted? I doubt it, I doubt it deeply. Glance at the works of any wise man, whether of the modern or the ancient

world. Justice, if we understand it as the equality of all living men before the laws of creation—and how else can we understand it? —never occupied any one's attention. Plato never once asked Destiny why she created Thersites contemptible and Patroclus noble. Plato argues that men should be just, but never once dares to arraign the gods for their injustice. If we listen to his discourses, a suspicion will steal into our souls that justice is a virtue for mortals, while the immortals have virtues of their own which have nothing in common with justice. And here is the last trial of earthly virtue. We do not know whether the human soul is mortal or immortal. Some, we know, believe in immortality, others laugh at the belief. If it were proved that they were both in the wrong, and that men's destinies after death are as unequal as they are in life: the successful, the chosen take up their abode in heaven, the others remain to rot in the grave and perish with their mortal clay. (It is true that such an admission is made by our Russian prophet, the priest of love and justice, Dostoevsky, in his *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*.) Now, if it should turn out that Dostoevsky is really immortal, while his innumerable disciples and admirers, the huge mass of grey humanity which is spoken of in *The Grand Inquisitor*, end their lives in death as they began them with birth, would Dostoevsky himself (whom I have named deliberately as the most passionate defender of

the ideal of justice, though there have been yet more fervent and passionate and remarkable defenders of justice on earth whom I ought perhaps to name, were it not that I would avoid speaking lightly of sacred things—let him who finds Dostoevsky small, himself choose another) —would Dostoevsky reconcile himself to such an injustice, would he rise in revolt beyond the grave against the injustice, or would he forget his poor brethren when he occupied the place prepared for him? It is hard to judge *a priori*: *a posteriori* one would imagine that he would forget.

And between Dostoevsky and a small provincial author the gulf is colossal; the injustice of the inequality cries out to heaven. Nevertheless we take no heed, we live on and do not cry, or if we do, we cry very rarely, and then, to tell the truth, it is hard to say certainly why we cry. Is it because we would draw the attention of the indifferent heaven, or is it because there are many amateurs of lamentation among our neighbours, like the pilgrim woman in Ostrovsky's *Storm*, who passionately loved to hear a good howl? All these considerations will seem particularly important to those who, like myself at the present moment—I cannot speak for to-morrow—share Dostoevsky's notion that even if there is immortality, then it is certainly not for everybody but for the few. Moreover, I follow Dostoevsky further and admit that they alone will rise from the dead who on the

existing hypotheses should expect the worse fate after death. The first here will be the first still, there, while of the last not even a memory will remain. And no one will be found to champion those who have perished: a Dostoevsky, a Tolstoi, and all the other 'first' who succeed in entering heaven will be engaged in business incomparably more important.

So continue, if you will, to take thought for the just arrangement of the world, and, after the fashion of Plato, to make the teaching of justice the foundation of philosophy.

V

The Force of Argument

Schopenhauer answered the question of the immortality of the soul in the negative. In his opinion, man as Thing-in-Himself is immortal, but as phenomenon mortal. In other words, all that is individual in us exists only in the interval between birth and death; but since each individual according to Schopenhauer's teaching is a manifestation of 'Will' or 'Thing-in-Itself,' the unalterable and eternal principle which is the only reality of the world, continually made object in the manifold of phenomena, then, in so far as this principle is displayed in man, he is eternal. This is Schopenhauer's opinion, evidently derived as a logical conclusion from his general philosophic doctrine, both from that relating to the

Thing-in-Itself, and from that which relates to the individual. The first part shall go unregarded: after all, if Schopenhauer was mistaken, and the Thing-in-Itself is mortal, we need not weep over it, nor is there any cause to rejoice over its immortality. But here is the individual. He is deprived of his right to immortality, and for reason is alleged an argument which is at first sight irrefutable. Everything which has a beginning has an end also, says Schopenhauer. The individual has a beginning, birth; therefore an end, death, awaits him. To Schopenhauer himself the general proposition as well as the conclusion seemed so obvious, that he did not admit the possibility of mistake even for a moment. But this time we have an incontestable case of a wrong conclusion from a wrong premiss. First, why must everything which has a beginning also have an end? The observations of experience point to such an hypothesis; but are the observations of experience really strong enough to support general propositions? And are we really entitled to make use of propositions so acquired as first principles for the solution of the most important problems of philosophy? And even if we admit that the premiss is correct, nevertheless the conclusion at which Schopenhauer arrived is wrongly drawn. It may indeed be that everything which has a beginning also has an end; it may indeed be that the individual is sooner or later doomed to perish; but why identify the moment

of the soul's destruction with the death of the body? It may be that the body will die, but the soul which the same fate attends at some future time will find for itself a more or less suitable integument somewhere in a distant planet, perhaps still unknown to us, and live on, though only for a little while and not for all eternity, as the extreme optimists believe. How important would it be for poor humanity to retain even such a hope: particularly seeing that we can hardly say with certainty what it is that men desire when they speak of the immortality of the soul. Is it that they merely desire at all costs to live eternally, or would they be satisfied with one or two lives more, especially if the subsequent lives should appear to be less offensively insignificant than this earthly existence, wherein even the lowest rank of nobility is to many an unattainable ideal? It seems to me that it is not every one who would consent to live eternally. And what if every possibility should have been exhausted, and endless repetition should begin?

It does not of course follow from this that we have the right to reckon upon an existence beyond the grave. The question remains open as before, even when Schopenhauer's arguments have been refuted. But it does follow that the best arguments on closer consideration often appear worthless. *Quod erat demonstrandum*—naturally pending the discovery of arguments to refute my refutation of Schopenhauer's. I

make this reserve to deprive my critics of the pleasure and possibility of a little wordplay.

VI

Swan Songs

It cannot be doubted that *When We Dead Awake* is one of the most autobiographical of Ibsen's plays. Nearly all his dramas reveal striking traces of his personal experience; their most valuable quality, even, is the possibility of following out in them the history of the author's inward struggle. But there is a particular significance in *When We Dead Awake*, which comes from the fact that it was conceived and written by the author in his old age. Those who are interested in overhearing what is said and watching what is done on the outskirts of life set an extraordinary value on the opportunity of communing with very old men, with the dying, and generally with men who are placed in exceptional conditions, above all when they are not afraid to speak the truth, and have by past experience developed in themselves the art and the courage—the former is as necessary as the latter—to look straight into the eyes of reality. To such men Ibsen seems even more interesting than Tolstoi. Tolstoi indeed has not yet betrayed his gift; but he is primarily a moralist. Now, as in his youth, power over men is the dearest thing of all to him, and more

fascinating than all the other blessings of the world. He still gives orders, makes demands, and desires at all costs to be obeyed. One may, and one ought, to consider this peculiarity of Tolstoi's nature with attention and respect. Not Tolstoi alone, but many a regal hermit of thought has to the end of his life demanded the unconditional surrender of mankind. On the day of his death, an hour before end, Socrates taught that there was only one truth and that the one which he had discovered. Plato in his extreme old age journeyed to Syracuse to plant the seeds of wisdom there. It is probable that such stubbornness in great men has its explanation and its deep meaning.

Tolstoi, and also Socrates and Plato, and the Jewish prophets, who in this respect and in many others were very like the teachers of wisdom, probably had to concentrate their powers wholly upon one gigantic inward task, the condition of its successful performance being the illusion that the whole world, the whole universe, works in concert and unison with them. In Tolstoi's case I have elsewhere shown that he finds himself at present on the brink of Solipsism in his conception of the world. Tolstoi and the whole world are to him synonymous. Without such a temporary delusion of his whole being—it is not an intellectual delusion, of the head, for the head knows well that the world is by itself, and Tolstoi by himself—he would have to give up his most important work. So it is with us, who know

since Copernicus that the earth moves round the sun, that the stars are not clear, bright, golden rings, but huge lumps of various composition, that there is not a firm blue vault overhead. We know these things : nevertheless we cannot and do not want to be so blind as not to take delight in the lie of the optical illusions of the visible world. Truth so-called has but a limited value. Nor does the sacrifice of Galileo by any means refute my words. *E pur si muove*, if ever he uttered the phrase, might not have referred to the movement of the earth, though it was spoken of the earth. Galileo did not wish to betray the work of his life. Who will, however, stand surety to us that not only Galileo is capable of such sacrifice, but his pupil also, even the most devoted and courageous, who has gained the new truth not by his own struggle but from the lips of his master. Peter in one night thrice denied Christ. Probably we could not find a single man in all the world who would consent to die to demonstrate and defend the idea of Galileo. Evidently great men are very little inclined to initiate the outsider into the secret of their great deeds. Evidently they cannot themselves always give a clear account of the character and meaning of the tasks which they set themselves. Socrates himself, who all his life long so stubbornly sought clarity and invented dialectics for the purpose, and introduced into general use definitions designed to fix the flowing reality ; Socrates, who spent thirty days without inter-

ruption in persuading his pupils that he was dying for the sake of truth and justice ; Socrates himself, I say, perhaps, most probably even, knew as little why he was dying as do simple people who die a natural death, or as babes born into the world know by what beneficent or hostile power they have been summoned from nonentity into being. Such is our life : wise men and fools, old men and children march at random to goals which have not yet been revealed by any books, whether worldly or spiritual, common or sacred. It is by no means with the desire to bring dogmatism into contempt that I recall these considerations. I have always been convinced, and am still certain, that dogmatists feel no shame, and are by no means to be driven out of life ; besides, I have lately come to the conclusion that the dogmatists are perfectly justified in their stubbornness. Belief, and the need of belief, are strong as love, as death. In the case of every dogmatist I now consider it my sacred duty to concede everything in advance, even to the acknowledgment of the least, and least significant, shades of his convictions and beliefs. There is but one limitation, one only, imperceptible and almost invisible : the dogmatist's convictions must not be absolutely and universally binding, that is, not binding upon the whole of mankind without exception. The majority, the vast majority, millions, even tens of millions of people, I will readily allow him, on the understanding that they themselves desire it, or that

he will show himself skilful enough to entice them to his side—violence is surely not to be admitted in matters of belief. In a word, I allow him almost the whole of humankind, in consideration whereof he must agree that his convictions are not intrinsically binding upon the few units or tens that remain. I agree to an outward submission. And the dogmatist, after such a victory—my confession is surely a complete victory for him—must consider himself satisfied in full.

Socrates was right, Plato, Tolstoi, the prophets were right: there is only one truth, one God; truth has the right to destroy lie, light to destroy darkness. God, omniscient, most gracious and omnipotent, will like Alexander of Macedon conquer nearly all the known world, and will drive out from his possessions, amid the triumphant and delighted shouts of his millions of loyal subjects, the devil and all those who are disobedient to his divine word. But he will renounce his claim to power over the souls of his few opponents, according to the agreement, and a handful of apostates will gather together on a remote isle, invisible to the millions, and will there continue their free, peculiar life. And here—to return to the beginning—among these few disobedient will be found Ibsen as he was in the last years of his life, as he is seen in his last drama. For in *When We Dead Awake* Ibsen approves and glorifies that which Gogol actually did fifty years ago. He renounces his art, and

with hatred and mockery recalls to mind what was once the business of his life. On April 15, 1866, Ibsen wrote to King Karl: 'I am not fighting for a careless existence; I am fighting for the work of my life, in which I unflinchingly believe, and which I know God has given me to do.' By the way, you will hardly find one of the great workers who has not repeated this assertion of Ibsen's, whether in the same or in another form. Evidently, without such an illusion, temporary or permanent, one cannot compass the intense struggle and the sacrifices which are the price of great work. Evidently, illusions of various kinds are necessary even for success in small things. In order that a little man should fulfil his microscopical work, he too must strain his little forces to the extreme. And who knows whether it did not seem to Akaky Akakievitch that God had assigned to him the task of copying the papers in the office and having a new uniform made? Of course he would never dare to say so, and he would never be able to, first because of his timidity, and then because he has not the gift of expression. The Muses do not bring their tribute to the poor and weak: they sing only Crœsus and Cæsar. But there is no doubt that the first in the village consider themselves as plainly designated by fate as the first in Rome. Cæsar felt this, and not mere ambition alone spoke in him when he uttered the famous phrase. Men do not believe in themselves and always yearn to occupy a position wherein the certainty, whether

justified or mistaken, may spring up within them that they stand in the sight of God. But with years all illusions vanish, and among them the illusion that God chooses certain men for his particular purposes and puts on them particular charges. Gogol, who had thus long understood his task as an author, burnt his best work before his death. Ibsen did almost the same. In the person of Professor Rubek he renounces his literary activity and jeers at it, though it had brought him everything that he could have expected from it, fame, respect, riches. . . . And think why! Because he had to sacrifice the man in him for the sake of the artist, to give up Irene whom he loved, to marry a woman to whom he was indifferent. Did Ibsen at the end of his life clearly discover that God had appointed him the task of being a male? But all men are males, while only individuals are artists. Had this been said, not by Ibsen, but by a common mortal, we would call it the greatest vulgarity. On the lips of Ibsen, an old man of seventy years, the author of *Brand*, from which the divines of Europe draw the matter for their sermons, on the lips of Ibsen who wrote *Emperor and Galilean* such a confession acquires an unexpected and mysterious meaning. Here you cannot escape with a shake of the head and a contemptuous smile. Not anybody, but Ibsen himself speaks—the first, not in the village, not in Rome even, but in the world. Here surely is the human law at work: 'Forswear not the prison nor the beggar's wallet!'

Perhaps it is opportune to recall the swan songs of Turgeniev. Turgeniev, too, had high ideals which he probably thought he had received direct from God. We may with assurance put into the mouth of Brand himself the phrase with which his remarkable essay, *Hamlet and Don Quixote*, concludes: 'Everything passes, good deeds remain.' In these words is the whole Turgeniev, or better, the whole conscious Turgeniev of that period of his life to which the essay belongs. And not only in that period, but up to the last minutes of his life, the conscious Turgeniev would not recant those words. But in the *Prose Poems* an utterly different motive is heard. All that he there relates, and all that Ibsen tells in his last drama, is permeated with one infinite, inextinguishable anguish for a life wasted in vain, for a life which had been spent in preaching 'good.' Yet neither youth, nor health, nor the powers that fail are regretted. Perhaps even death has no terrors. . . . What the old Turgeniev cannot away with are his memories of 'the Russian girl.' He described and sang her as no one in Russian literature before him, but she was to him only an ideal; he, like Rubek, had not touched her. Ibsen had not touched Irene; he went off to Madame Viardo. And this is an awful sin, in no wise to be atoned, a mortal sin, the sin of which the Bible speaks. All things will be forgiven, all things pass, all things will be forgotten: this crime will remain for ever. That is the meaning of Turgeniev's

senilia; that is the meaning of Ibsen's *senilia*. I have deliberately chosen the word *senilia*, though I might have said swan songs, though it would even have been more correct to speak of swan songs. 'Swans,' says Plato, 'when they feel the approach of death, sing that day better than ever, rejoicing that they will find God, whom they serve.' Ibsen and Turgeniev served the same God as the swans, according to the Greek belief, the bright God of songs, Apollo. And their last songs, their *senilia*, were better than all that had gone before. In them is a bottomless depth awful to the eye, but how wonderful! There all things are different from what they are with us on the surface. Should one hearken to the temptation and go to the call of the great old men, or should he tie himself to the mast of conviction, verified by the experience of mankind, and cover his ears as once the crafty Ulysses did to save himself from the Syrens? There is a way of escape: there is a word which will destroy the enchantment. I have already uttered it: *senilia*. Turgeniev wished to call his *Prose Poems* by this name—manifestations of sickness, of infirmity, of old age. These are terrible; one must run away from these! Schopenhauer, the philosopher and metaphysician, feared to revise the works of his youth in his old age. He felt that he would spoil them by his mere touch. And all men mistrust old age, all share Schopenhauer's apprehensions. But what if all are mistaken? What if *senilia* bring us

nearer to the truth? Perhaps the soothsaying birds of Apollo grieve in unearthly anguish for another existence; perhaps their fear is not of death but of life; perhaps in Turgeniev's poems, as well as in Ibsen's last drama, are already heard, if not the last, then at least the penultimate words of mankind.

VII

What is Philosophy?

In text-books of philosophy you will find most diverse answers to this question. During the twenty-five hundred years of its existence it has been able to make an immense quantity of attempts to define the substance of its task. But up till now no agreement has been reached between the acknowledged representatives of the lovers and favourites of wisdom. Every one judges in his own way, and considers his opinion as the only true one; of a *consensus sapientium* it is impossible even to dream. But strangely enough, exactly in this disputable matter wherein the agreement of savants and sages is so impossible, the *consensus profanorum* is fully attained. All those who were never engaged in philosophy, who have never read learned books, or even any books at all, answer the question with rare unanimity. True, it is apparently impossible to judge of their opinions directly, because people of this kind cannot speak at all in the language evolved

by science; they never put the question in such a form, still less can they answer it in the accepted words. But we have an important piece of indirect evidence which gives us the right to form a conclusion. There is no doubt that all those who have gone to philosophy for answers to the questions which tormented them, have left her disenchanted, unless they had a sufficiently eminent gift to enable them to join the guild of professional philosophers. From this we may unhesitatingly conclude, although the conclusion is for the time being only negative, that philosophy is engaged in a business which may be interesting and important to the few, but is tedious and useless to the many.

This conclusion is highly consoling as well for the sage as for the profane. For every sage, even the most exalted, is at the same time one of the profane—if we discard the academical use of words—a human being, pure and simple. To him also it may happen that those tormenting questions will arise, which ordinary people used to bring to him, as for instance in the case of Tolstoi's Ivan Ilyich or Tchekhov's professor in *The Tedious Story*. And then he will of course be obliged to confess that the necessary answers are missing from the great tomes which he has studied so well. For what can be more terrible to a man than to be compelled in the hard moments of his life to acknowledge any doctrine of philosophy as binding upon him? For instance, to be compelled to hold with Plato, Spinoza, or

Schopenhauer that the chief problem of life is moral perfection, or in other words, self-renunciation. It was easy for Plato to preach justice. It did not in the least prevent him from being the son of his time, or from breaking to a permissible extent the commandments which he himself had given. By all the evidence Spinoza was much more resolute and consequent than Plato; he indeed kept the passions in subservience, but that was his personal and individual inclination. Consistence was not merely a property of his mind, but of his whole being. Displaying it, he displayed himself. As for Schopenhauer, it is known that he praised the virtues only in his books; but in life, like many another clever, independent man, he was guided by the most diverse considerations.

But these are all masters, who devise systems and imperatives. Whereas the pupil, seeking in philosophy an answer to his questions, cannot permit himself any liberties and digressions from the universal rules, for the essence and the fundamental problem of any doctrine reduces to the subordination not merely of men's conduct, but of the life of the whole universe to one regulating principle. Individual philosophers have discovered such principles, but to this day they have reached no final agreement among themselves, and this to some extent lightens the burden of those unhappy ones who, having lost the hope of finding help and guidance elsewhere, have turned to philosophy. If there is not in

philosophy one universal principle binding upon and acknowledged by all, it means that it is permitted to each man, at least for the meantime, to feel and even to act in his own way. A man may listen to Spinoza, or he may stop his ears. He may kneel before Plato's eternal ideas, or he may give his allegiance to the ever-changing, ever-flowing reality. Finally, he may accept Schopenhauer's pessimism, but nothing on earth can compel him to celibacy on the ground that Schopenhauer successfully laughed at love. Nor is there any necessity at all, in order to win such freedom for one's self, to be armed with the light dialectic of the old Greek philosopher, or with the heavy logic of the poor Dutch Jew, or with the subtle wit of the profound German. Neither is it necessary to dispute them. It is even possible to agree with them all. The room of the world is infinite, and will not only contain all those who lived once and those who are yet to be born, but will give to each one of them all that he can desire : to Plato, the world of ideas, to Spinoza, the one eternal and unchangeable substance, to Schopenhauer, the Nirvana of Buddhism. Each of these, and all the other philosophers, will find what they want in the universe even to the belief, even to the conviction, that theirs are the only true and universal doctrines. But, at the same time, the profane will find suitable worlds for themselves. From the fact that people are cooped up on the earth, and that they must put forth efforts beyond belief to gain each cubit of

earth, and even their illusory liberties, it by no means follows that poverty, obscurantism, and despotism must be considered eternal and original principles, and that economical uniformity is the last refuge of man. A plurality of worlds, a plurality of men and gods amid the vast spaces of the vast universe—this is, if I may be forgiven the word, an ideal. It is true it is not built according to the idealists. Yet what a conclusion does it foreshadow! We leave the disputes and arguments of philosophers aside, so soon as we begin to speak of gods. According to the existing beliefs and hypotheses the gods also have always been quarrelling and fighting among themselves. Even in monotheistic religions people always made their God enter a fight, and devised an eminent opponent for him—the devil. Men can by no means rid themselves of the thought that everything in heaven goes on in exactly the same way as it does on the earth, and they attribute all their own bad qualities as well as their good ones to the denizens of heaven. Whereas it is by far the most probable that a great many of the things which are, according to our notions, perfectly inseparable from life do not exist in heaven. Among other things, there is no struggle. And this is well. For every struggle, sooner or later, develops inevitably into a fight. When the supply of logical and ethical arguments is exhausted, one thing is left for the irreconcilable opponents—to come to blows, which do in fact usually decide the

issue. The value of logical and ethical arguments is arbitrarily assigned, but material force is measured by foot-pounds and can be calculated in advance. So that where on the common supposition there will be no foot-pounds, the issue of the fight will very often remain undecided. When Lermontov's demon goes to Tamara's cell, an angel meets him on the way. The demon says that Tamara belongs to him; the angel demands her for himself. The demon will not be dissuaded by words and arguments: he is not built that way. As for the angel, he always considers himself doubly right. How can the issue be decided? At last Lermontov, who could not or dared not devise a new solution, admitted the interference of material force: Tamara is dragged away from the demon exactly as the stronger robber pulls his prey from the weaker on earth. Evidently the poet admitted that conclusion, that he might pay his tribute to the piety of tradition. But in my opinion the solution is not pious, but merely blasphemous. In it the traces of barbarity and idolatry are still clearly visible. The tastes and attributes of which earthly despots dream are attributed to God. By all means he must be, he desires to be, the strongest, the very first, just like Julius Cæsar in his youth. He fears rivalry above all things, and never forgives his unconquered enemies. This is evidently a barbarous mistake. God does not want to be the strongest, the very first, at all. Certainly—for that would be in-

telligible and in accordance with common sense —he would not like to be weaker than others, in order that he might not be exposed to violence; but there is no foundation at all for attributing to him ambition or vainglory. Therefore there is equally no reason to think that he does not suffer equals, desires to be supreme, and seeks at all costs to destroy the devil. Most probably he lives in peace and concord even with those who least adapt themselves to his tastes and habits. Perhaps he is even delighted that not all are as he, and he readily shares his possessions with the devil, the more readily because by such a division neither loses, since the infinite—I admit that God's possessions are infinite—divided by two and even by the greatest possible finite number still leaves infinity.

Now we can return to the original question, and it seems that we can even give an answer to it—two answers even, one for the sage, another for the profane. To the first, philosophy is art for art's sake. Every philosopher tries to construct a harmonious and various system, curiously and nicely fashioned, using for his material his own intrinsic experience as well as his own personal observations of the life beyond him, and the observations of others. A philosopher is an artist of his kind, to whom his works are dearer than everything in life, sometimes dearer than life itself. We very often see philosophers sacrifice everything for the sake of their work—even truth. Not so the profane. To them philo-

sophy—more exactly, that which they would call philosophy if they possessed a scientific terminology—is the last refuge when material forces have been wasted, when there are no weapons left to fight for their stolen rights. Then they run for help and support to a place which they have always taken care to avoid before. Think of Napoleon at St. Helena. He who had been collecting soldiers and guns all his life, began to philosophise when he was bound hand and foot. Certainly he behaved in this new sphere like a beginner, a very inexperienced and, strange to say, a pusillanimous novice.

He who feared neither pestilence nor bullet, was afraid, we know, of a dark room. Men used to philosophy, like Schopenhauer, walk boldly and with confidence in a dark room, though they run away from gun shots, and even less dangerous things. The great captain, the once Emperor of nearly all Europe, Napoleon, philosophised on St. Helena, and even went so far as to begin to ingratiate himself with morality, evidently supposing that upon morality his ultimate fate depended. He assured her that for her sake, and her sake alone, he had contrived his murderous business—he who, all the while a crown was on his head and a victorious army in his hands, hardly knew even of the existence of morality. But this is so intelligible. If one were to come upon a perfectly new and unknown world at the age of forty-five, then surely everything would seem terrible, and one would take

the incorporeal morality for the arbiter of destiny. And one would plan to seduce her, if possible, with sweet words and false promises, as a lady of the world. But these were the first steps of a tyro. It was as hard for Napoleon to master philosophy as it was for Charlemagne at the end of his days to learn to write. But he knew why he had come to the new place, and neither Plato nor Spinoza nor Kant could dissuade him of this. Perhaps at the beginning, while he was as yet unused to the darkness, he would pretend to agree with the acknowledged authorities, thinking that here too, just as there where he lived before, exalted personages do not tolerate opposition; perhaps he would lie to them as he lied to morality, but his business he would not forget. He came to philosophy with *demands*, and would not rest till he had received satisfaction. He had already seen how a Corsican lieutenant had become a French Emperor. Why should not the beaten Emperor fight his last fight? . . . And how shall he be reconciled with self-renunciation? Philosophy will surrender: it is only necessary not to surrender in one's self. So does a Napoleon come to philosophy, and so does he understand her. And until the contrary is proven, nothing can prevent us from thinking that the Napoleons are right, and therefore that academical philosophy is not the last nor even the penultimate word. For, perhaps, the last word is hidden in the hearts of the tongue-tied, but bold, persistent, implacable men.

VIII

Heinrich Heine

More than a hundred years have passed since the birth, and fifty years since the death, of this remarkable man, but the history of literature has not yet finally settled accounts with him. Even the Germans, perhaps the Germans above all, find it impossible to agree upon the valuation of his gift. Some consider him a genius, others a man devoid of talent and insipid. Moreover, his enemies still bring as much passion to their attacks upon him as they did before, as though they were waging war upon a live opponent in place of a dead one. They hate him for the same things which made his contemporaries hate him. We know that it was principally for his insincerity that they did not forgive him. No one could tell when he was speaking seriously and when in jest, what he loved and what he hated, and finally it was quite impossible to determine whether or not he believed in God. It must be confessed that the Germans were right in many of their accusations. I value Heine extremely highly; in my opinion he is one of the greatest German poets; and yet I cannot undertake to say with certainty what he loved, what he believed, and often I cannot tell how serious he is in uttering one or another of his opinions. Nevertheless I find it impossible to detect any insincerity in his

works. On the contrary, those peculiarities of his, which so irritated the Germans, are in my eyes so many proofs of his wonderful and unique sincerity. I think that if the Germans were mistaken and misunderstood Heine, hypertrophied self-love and the power of prejudice is the cause. Heine's usual method is to begin to speak with perfect seriousness, and to end with biting raillery and sarcasm. Critics and readers, who generally do not guess at the outset what awaits them in the event, have taken the unexpected laughter to their own account, and have been deeply offended. Wounded self-love never forgives; and the Germans could not forgive Heine for his jests. And yet Heine but rarely attacked others: most of his mockery is directed against himself, and above all in the work of his last creative period, of the years when he lived in the *Matrazengrab*.

With us in Russia many were offended with Gogol, believing that he was jeering at them. Later, he confessed that he had been describing himself. Nor does the inconstancy of Heine's opinions in any way prove him insincere. His intention was by no means always to fling at the Philistines. Indeed, he did not know what to believe; he changed his tastes and attachments, and did not even always know for certain what he preferred at the moment. Of course, had he wished, he might have pretended to be consequent and consistent. Or, had he been less eagle-eyed, he might with the vast majority of

men have adopted a ceremonial dress once for all, he might have professed and invariably preached ideas which had no relation to his real emotions and moods. Many people think that one ought to act thus, that (particularly in literature) one must speak only officially and exhibit lofty ideas that have been proclaimed by wise men since time immemorial, without their having made the least inquiry whether they correspond to their own natures or not. Often cruel, vindictive, spiteful, selfish, mean people sincerely praise goodness, forgiveness, love to one's enemy, generosity and magnanimity in their books, while of their tastes and passions they speak not a single word. They are confident that passions exist only to be suppressed, and that convictions only are to be exhibited or displayed. A man rarely succeeds in suppressing his passions, but it is extremely easy to hide them, especially in books. And such dissimulation is not only not condemned, but recognised and even encouraged. The common and familiar programme is accepted: in life 'passions' judge 'convictions,' in books 'convictions,' or 'ideals,' as they are called, pass sentence upon 'passions.' I would emphasise the fact that most writers are convinced that their business is not to tell of themselves, but to praise ideals. Heine's sincerity was really of a different order. He told everything, or nearly everything, of himself. And this was thought so shocking that the sworn custodians

of convention and good morals considered themselves wounded in their best and loftiest feelings. It seemed to them that it would be disastrous if Heine were to succeed in acquiring a great literary influence, and in getting a hold upon the minds of his contemporaries. Then would crumble the foundations, constructed through centuries of arduous labour by the united efforts of the most distinguished representatives of the nation. This is perhaps true: the lofty magnificence of life can be preserved only upon the indispensable condition of hypocrisy. In order that it should be beautiful, much must be hidden and thrust away as far and deep as possible. The sick and the mad must be herded into hospitals; poverty into cellars; disobedient passions into the depths of the soul. Truth and freedom are only allowed to obtrude upon the attention as far as is compatible with the interests of a life well arranged within and without. The Protestant Church understood this as well as the Catholic, perhaps better. Strict puritanism elevated spiritual discipline to the highest moral law, which ruled life with unrelenting and inexorable despotism. Marriage and the family, not love, must be the aim of man; and poor Gretchen, who gave herself to Faust without observing the established ceremonial, was forced to consider herself eternally damned. The inward discipline still more than the outward guarded the foundations and gave strength and force to the State as well as to the people. Men

and women were not spared; they were not even taken into account. Hundreds and thousands of Gretchens, men and women, were sacrificed, and are being sacrificed still, without pity to 'the highest spiritual interests.'

Acknowledgment and respect for the prescribed order had become so deeply rooted in the German soul—I speak of Germany, because no other nation upon earth is so highly disciplined—that even the most independent characters yielded to it. The most dreadful sin is not the breaking of the law—a violation which like Gretchen's can be explained by weakness and weakness alone, though it was not forgiven, was less severely condemned—but rebellion against the law, the open and daring refusal to obey, even though it be expressed in the most insignificant act. Therefore every one tends to show his loyalty from that side first of all. In a greater or less degree all have transgressed the law, but the more one has violated it in act, the more imperative he considers its glorification in words. And this order of things aroused neither suspicion nor discontent. Therein could be seen acknowledged the superiority of spirit over body, of mind over passion. Nobody ever asked the question: 'Is it really true that the spirit must have the mastery over the body, and the mind over the passions?' And when Heine allowed himself to put the question and to answer it in his own way, the whole force of German indignation burst upon him. First of all they suspected his sincerity

and truthfulness. 'It is impossible,' said the pious, 'that he really should not acknowledge the law. He is only pretending.' Such a supposition was the more natural because the ring of conviction was not always to be heard in Heine's tone: one of his poems ends with the following words: 'I seek the body, the body, the young and tender body. The soul you may bury deep in the ground—I myself have soul enough.' The poem is daring and provocative in the extreme, but in it, as in all Heine's daring and provocative poems, may be heard a sharp and nervous laugh, which must be understood as the expression of the divided soul, as a mockery of himself. It is he who tells of his meeting with two women, mother and daughter. Both please him: the mother by her much knowledge, the daughter by her innocence. And the poet stands between them, in his own words, like Buridan's ass between two bundles of hay. Again, daring, again, the laugh; and again the well-balanced German is irritated. He would prefer that no one should ever speak of such emotions, and if they are to be spoken of, then it must be at least in a penitent tone, with self-accusation. But Heine's misplaced laughter is indecent and quite uselessly disconcerting. I repeat that Heine himself was not always sure that his 'sincerity' was lawful. While he was still a youth he told how there suddenly ran through his soul, as through the whole earth, a rent which split asunder the unity of his former

emotions. King David when he praised God and good did not remember his dark deeds—of which there were not a few—or, if he did remember them, it was only to repent. His soul was also divided, but he was able to preserve a sequence. When he wept, he could not and did not want to rejoice; when he repented, he was already far from sin; when he prayed, he did not scoff; when he believed, he did not doubt. The Germans, brought up on the great king's psalms, had come to think that these things were impossible and ought never to be possible. They admitted the succession of different, and even contradictory spiritual conditions, but their simultaneous existence appeared to them unintelligible and disgusting, in contradiction with divine commandments and the laws of logic. It seemed to them that everything which formerly existed as separate, had become confused, that the place of stringent harmony had been usurped by absurdity and chaos. They thought that such a state of things threatened innumerable miseries. They did not admit the idea that Heine himself might not understand it; in his creation they saw the manifestation of a false and evil will, and they invoked divine and human judgment upon it. The Philistine irritation reached the extreme when it became clear that Heine had not humbled himself even before the face of death. Stricken by paralysis, he lay in his *Matrazengrab*, unable to stir a limb; he suffered the most intense bodily pains, with no hope of cure, or even of

relief, yet he still continued to blaspheme as before. Worse still, his sarcasms every day became more ruthless, more poisonous, more refined. It might have been thought that it was left to him, crushed and destroyed, only to acknowledge his defeat and to commit himself utterly to the magnanimity of the victor. But in the weak flesh a strong spirit lived. All his thoughts were turned to God, the power of whose right hand, like every dying man, he could not but feel upon him. But his thoughts of God, his attitude to God, were so original that the serious people of the outer world could only shrug their shoulders. No one ever spoke thus to God, either aloud or to himself. The thought of death usually inspires mortals with fear or admiration ; therefore they either kneel before him and implore forgiveness or sing his praises. Heine has neither prayer nor praise. His poems are permeated with a charming and gracious cynicism, peculiar and proper to himself alone. He does not want to confess his sins, and even now on the threshold of another life he remains as he was in youth. He desires neither paradise, nor bliss, nor heaven ; he asks God to give him back his health, and to put his money affairs in order. 'I know there is much evil and many vices on earth. But I have grown used to all that now, and besides I seldom leave my room. Ө God, leave me here, but heal my infirmities, and spare me from want,' he writes in one of his last poems. He derides the legends of the blissful life of sinless souls in paradise.

'Sitting on the clouds and singing psalms is a pastime quite unsuited to me.' He remembers the beautiful Venus of the Louvre and praises her as in the days of youth. His poem, *Das Hohelied*, is a mixture of extreme cynicism, nobility, despair, and incredible sarcasm. I do not know whether dying men have had such thoughts as those which are expressed in this poem, but I am confident that no one has expressed anything like them in literature. In Goethe's *Prometheus* there is nothing of the provocative, unshakable, calm pride and the consciousness of his rights which inspired the author of *Das Hohelied*. God, who created heaven and earth and man upon the earth, is free to torment my body and soul to his fill, but I myself know what I need and desire, I myself decide what is good and what is bad. That is the meaning of this poem, and of all that Heine wrote in the last years of his life. He knew as well as any one that according to the doctrines of philosophy, ethics, and religion, repentance and humility are the condition of the soul's salvation, the readiness even with the last breath of life to renounce sinful desires. Nevertheless, with his last breath he does not want to own the power over himself of the age-old authorities of the world. He laughs at morality, at philosophy, and at existing religions. The wise men think so, the wise men want to live in their own way; let them think, let them live. But who gave them the right to demand obedience from me?

Can they have the power to compel me to obedience ? Listening to the words of the dying man, shall we not repeat his question ? Shall we not take one step further ? Heine is crushed, and if we may believe, as we have every reason to believe what he tells us in his ' Song of Songs,' his painful and terrible illness was the direct effect and consequence of his manner of life. Does it mean that in the future, too (if future there is), new persecutions await him, until the day when of his own accord he will subscribe to the proclaimed and established morality ? Have we the right to suppose that there are powers somewhere in the universe preoccupied with the business of cutting out all men, even down to the last, after the same pattern ? Perhaps Heine's contumacy points to quite a different intention of the arbiters of destiny. Perhaps the illness and torture prepared for those who fight against collars and blinkers—experience demonstrates with sufficient certainty that any declination from the high road and the norm inevitably brings suffering and ruin in its train—are only the trial of the human spirit. Who will endure them, who will stand up for himself, afraid neither of God nor of the devil and his ministers, he will enter victoriously into another world. Sometimes I even think, in opposition to existing opinion, that *there* the stubborn and inflexible are valued above all others, and that the secret is hidden from mortals lest the weak and compliant should take it into their heads to pretend to be stubborn, in

order to deserve the favour of the gods. But he who will not endure, but will deny himself, may expect the fate of which philosophers and metaphysicians generally dream. He will be united with the *primum mobile*, he will be dissolved in the essence of being together with the mass of individuals like himself. I am tempted to think that the metaphysical theories which preach self-renunciation for the sake of love, and love for the sake of self-renunciation, are by no means empty and idle, as the positivists affirm. In them lies a deep, mysterious, and mystical meaning: in them is hidden a great truth. Their only mistake is that they pretend to be absolute. For some reason or other men have decided that empirical truths are many, but that metaphysical truth is one. Metaphysical truths are also many, but that does not in the least prevent them from living in harmony one with another. Empirical truths like all earthly beings are continually quarrelling, and cannot get on without superior authority. But metaphysical truths are differently arranged and know nothing whatsoever of our rivalry. There is no doubt that people who feel the burden of their individuality and thirst for self-renunciation are absolutely right. Every probability points to their at last attaining their purpose and being united to that to which they should be united, whether neighbour or remote, or perhaps, as the pantheists desire, even to inanimate nature. But it is just as probable that those who value their individuality and do not

consent to renounce it either for the sake of their neighbours or of a lofty idea, will preserve themselves and will remain themselves, if not for ever and ever, at least for a sufficiently long while, until they are weary. Therefore the Germans must not be cross with Heine, at least those Germans who have judged him not from the utilitarian point of view—from this point of view I too utterly condemn him, and find for him no justification at all—but from the lofty, religious or metaphysical point of view, as it is called nowadays. He cannot possibly disturb them in any way. They will be united, down to the last they probably will be united in the Idea, the thing in itself, in Substance, or any other alluring unity; and not Heine with his sarcasms will keep them from their lofty aspirations. While if he and those like him continue to live in their own way in a place apart and even laugh at ideas—can that really be the occasion of serious annoyance?

IX

What is Truth?

The sceptics assert that truth does not and cannot exist, and the assertion has eaten so deep into the modern mind, that the only philosophy which has spread in our day is that of Kant, which takes scepticism for its point of departure. But read the preface to the first edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason* attentively, and you will

be convinced that he had absolutely no concern with the question : ' What is truth ? ' He only set himself to solve the problem, what should a man do who had been convinced of the impossibility of finding the objective truth. The old metaphysic with its arbitrary and unproven assertions, which could not bear criticism, irritated Kant, and he decided to get rid, even though by accepting the relative legitimacy of scepticism, of the unscientific discipline which he, as a teacher of philosophy, had to represent. But the confidence of the sceptics and Kant's deference are not in the least binding upon us. And after all Kant himself did not fulfil the obligations which he undertook. For if we do not know what is truth, what value have the postulates of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul ? How can we justify or explain any one of the existing religions, Christianity included ? Although the Gospel does not at all agree with our scientific notions of the laws of nature, yet it does not in itself contain anything contrary to reason. We do not disbelieve in miracles because they are impossible. On the contrary, it is as clear as day to the most ordinary common sense that life itself, the foundation of the world, is the miracle of miracles. And if the task of philosophy had reduced to the mere demonstration of the possibility of a miracle, her business would have been splendidly accomplished long ago. The whole trouble is that visible miracles are not enough for people, and

that it is impossible to deduce from the fact that many miracles have already taken place that other miracles, without which mere existence is often impossible, will also happen in due course. Men are being born—without doubt a great miracle; there exists a beautiful world—also a miracle of miracles. But does it follow that men will rise from the grave, and that paradise is made ready for them? The raising of Lazarus is not much believed nowadays even by those who revere the Gospel, not because they will not admit the possibility of miracles in general, but because they cannot decide *a priori* which miracles are possible and which are not, and therefore they are obliged to judge *a posteriori*. They readily accept a miracle that has happened, but they doubt the miracle that has not happened, and *the more they doubt*, the more passionately do they desire it. It costs nothing to believe in the final triumph of good upon the earth (though it would be an absolute miracle), in progress or the infallibility of the Pope (these too are miracles and by no means inconsiderable), for after all men are quite sufficiently indifferent to good, to progress, and to the virtues of the Pope. It is much harder, nay quite impossible, standing before the dead body of one who is near and dear, to believe that an angel will fly down from heaven and bring the dead to life again, although the world is full of happenings no less miraculous than the raising of the dead.

Therefore the sceptics are wrong when they

assert that there is no truth. Truth exists, but we do not know it in all its volume, nor can we formulate that which we do know: we cannot imagine why it happened thus and not otherwise, or whether that which happened had to happen thus, or whether something else quite different might have happened. Once it was held that reality obeys the laws of necessity, but Hume explained that the notion of necessity is subjective, and therefore must be discarded as illusory. His idea was caught up (without the deduction) by Kant. All those of our judgments which have the character of universality and necessity, acquire it only by virtue of our psychological organisation. In those cases where we are particularly convinced of the objective value of our judgment, we have merely to do with a purely subjective certainty, though it is immutable and secure in the visible world. It is well known that Kant did not accept Hume's deduction: not only did he make no attempt to banish the false premisses from our intellectual economy, as Hume did with the conception of necessity, but, on the contrary, he declared that such an attempt was quite impracticable. The practical reason suggested to Kant that though the foundations of our judgments are vitiated by their source, yet their invariability may be of great assistance in the world of phenomena, that is in the space between the birth and death of man. If a man has lived before birth (as Plato held), and will live after death, then

his ' truths ' were not, and will not be necessary there, in the other world. What truths are *there*, and whether there are any truths at all, Kant only guesses, and he succeeds in his guesses only because of his readiness to ignore logic in his conclusions. He suddenly gives faith an immense right to judge of the real world, a right of which faith would never dream had it not been taken under his special patronage by the philosopher himself. But why can faith do that which reason cannot ? And a yet more insidious question : Are not all postulates invented by the same mind which was deprived of its rights in the first Critique, but which subsequently obtained a verdict of *restitutio in integrum*, by changing the name of the firm ? The last hypothesis is the most probable. And if so, then does it not follow that in the real world so carefully divided by Kant from the world of phenomena we will find much that is new, but not a little that is old.

In general it is clear that the assumption that our world is a world of an instant, a brief dream, utterly unlike real life, is mistaken. This assumption, first enunciated by Plato, and afterwards elaborated and maintained by many representatives of religious and philosophical thought, is based upon no data at all. There 's no denying, it is very pleasant. But as often happens, as soon as the wish was invested with language, by the mere fact it received too sharp and angular an expression, so that it lost all

resemblance to itself. The essence of the true, primordial life beyond the grave appears to Plato as absolute good refined from all alloy, as the essence of virtue. But after all Plato himself cannot suffer the absolute emptiness of the ideal existence, and constantly flavours it with elements which are by no means ideal, but which give interest and intensity to his dialogues. If you have never had the occasion to read Plato himself, acquaint yourself with his philosophy through the teaching of any of his admirers and appreciators, and you will be struck by its emptiness. Read the thick volume of Natorp's well-known work, and you will see what value there is in Plato's 'purified' doctrine. And in passing I would recommend as a general rule, this method of examining the ideas of famous philosophers, by acquainting oneself with them not only in the original works, but in the expositions of their disciples, particularly of faithful and conscientious disciples. When the fascination of the personality and the genius disappears and the naked, unadorned 'truth' remains—disciples always believe that the master had the truth, and they reveal it without any embellishment or fig leaf — only then does it become quite clear of how little value are the fundamental thoughts of even the most exalted philosophers. Still more obvious does it become when the faithful disciple begins to draw conclusions from his master's proportions. The book of the aforesaid Natorp, a great Plato

expert, is a *reductio ad absurdum* of all his master's ideas. Plato is revealed as a logical Neo-Kantian, a narrow-minded savant, who had been put thoroughly through the mill at Freiburg or Heidelberg. It is also revealed that Plato's ideas, in the pure state, do not in the least express his real attitude to life and to the world. One must take the whole Plato with his contradictions and inconsequence, with his vices and virtues, and value his defects at least as much as his qualities, or even add one or two defects, and be blind to one or two virtues. For it is probable that he, as a man to whom nothing human was alien, tried to assume a few virtues which he did not possess, and to conceal a few failings. This course should be followed with other masters of wisdom and their doctrines. Then 'the other world' will not appear to be separated by such an abyss from our earthly vale. And perhaps, in spite of Kant, some empirical truths will be found common to both worlds. Then Pilate's question will lose much of its all-conquering certainty. He wished to wash his hands of the business, and he asked, 'What is truth?' After him and before him, many who had no desire to struggle have devised ingenious questions and taken their stand upon scepticism. But every one knows that truth does exist, and sometimes can even formulate its own conception with the clarity and precision demanded by Descartes. Is the miraculous bounded by the miracles that have already been

seen on earth, or are its limits set much wider? And if wider, then how much?

X

More of Truth

Perhaps truth is by nature such that its communication between men is impossible, at least the usual communication by means of language. Every one may know it in himself, but in order to enter into communication with his neighbour he must renounce the truth and accept some conventional lie. Nevertheless the value and importance of truth is by no means lessened by the fact that it cannot be given a market valuation. If you were asked what is truth, you could not answer the question even though you had given your whole life to the study of philosophical theories. In yourself, if you have no one to answer, you know well what the truth is. Therefore truth does not by nature resemble empirical truth in the least, and before entering the world of philosophy, you must bid farewell to scientific methods of search, and to the accustomed methods of estimating knowledge. In a word, you must be ready to accept something absolutely new, quite unlike what is traditional and old. That is why the tendency to discredit scientific knowledge is by no means so useless as may at first sight appear to the inexperienced eye.

That is why irony and sarcasm prove to be a necessary weapon of the investigator. The most dangerous enemy of new knowledge always has been, and always will be, inculcated habit. From the practical point of view it is much more important to a man to know the things which may help him to adapt himself to the temporary conditions of his existence, than those which have a timeless value. The instinct of self-preservation always proves stronger than the sincerest desire for knowledge. Moreover, one must remember that the instinct has at its disposal innumerable and most subtle weapons of defence, that all human faculties without exception are under its command, from unconscious reflexes up to the enthroned mind and august consciousness. Much and often has been said in this regard, and for once the *consensus sapientium* is on my side. True, this is treated as an undeniable perversion of human nature—and here I make my protest. I think that there is in this nothing undesirable. Our mind and consciousness must consider it an honour that they can find themselves in the service of instinct, even if it be the instinct of self-preservation. They should not be conceited, and to tell the truth they are not conceited, but readily fulfil their official mission. They pretend to priority only in books, and tremble at the thought of pre-eminence in life. If by some accident they were allowed freedom of action they would go mad with terror, like children lost in a forest at

night. Every time that the mind and consciousness begin to judge independently, they reach destructive conclusions. And then they see with surprise that this time too they were not acting freely, but under the dictation of the self-same instinct, which had assumed a different character. The human soul desired the work of destruction, and she loosed the slaves from their chains, and they in wild enthusiasm began to celebrate their freedom by making great havoc, not in the least suspecting that they remained just as they were before, slaves who work for others.

Long ago Dostoevsky pointed out that the instinct of destruction is as natural to the human soul as that of creation. Beside these two instincts all our faculties appear to be minor psychological properties, required only under given, and accidental, conditions. Of truth—as not only the crass materialists now confess, but the idealists also have found in their metaphysic—nothing remains but the idea of the norm. To speak in more expressive and intelligible language, truth exists only in order that men who are separated in time and space might establish between themselves some kind of communication at least. That is, a man must choose between absolute loneliness with truth, on the one side, and communion with his neighbours and falsehood, on the other. Which is the better, it will be asked. The question is idle, I reply. There is a third way still : to accept both, though

it may at first appear utterly absurd, especially to people who have once for all decided that logic, like mathematics, is infallible. Whereas it is possible, and not merely possible—we would not be content with a possibility: only a German idealist can be satisfied with a good which was never realised in any place at all—it is continually observed that the most contradictory spiritual states do coexist. All men lie when they begin to speak: our language is so imperfectly arranged that the principle of its arrangement presupposes a readiness to speak untruth. The more abstract the subject is, the more does the disposition to lie increase, until, when we touch upon the most complicated questions, we have to lie incessantly, and the lie is the more intolerable and coarse the more sincere we are. For a sincere man is convinced that veracity is assured by the absence of contradictions, and in order to avoid all appearance of lie, he tries to make a logical agreement between his opinions: that is to raise his lie to Herculean heights. In his turn, when he receives the opinions of others, he applies the same criterion, and the moment he notices the smallest contradiction, he begins naïvely to cry out against the violation of the fundamental decencies. What is particularly curious is that all the learned students of philosophy—and it is strictly to them that I address myself here, as the reader has probably observed long ago—certainly are well aware that no single one of the mightiest

philosophers has hitherto succeeded in eliminating all contradictions from his system. How well armed was Spinoza! He spared no effort, and stuck at nothing, and yet his remarkable system will not bear logical criticism. That is a matter of common knowledge. So it appears that we ought to ask what the devil is the use of consistency, and whether contradictions are not the condition of truthfulness in one's conception of the world. And after Kant, his disciples and successors might have answered quietly that the devil alone knows the use of consistency, and that truth lives by contradictions. As a matter of fact, Hegel and Schopenhauer, each in his own way, partly attempted to make an admission of this kind, but they derived small profit from it.

Let us try to draw some conclusions from the foregoing. Certainly, while logic can be useful, it would be unjustifiable recklessness to refuse its services. Nor are the conclusions devoid of interest, as we shall see. First of all, when you speak, never trouble to be consistent with what you said before: that will put an unnecessary check upon your freedom, which, without that additional fetter, is already chained in words and grammatical forms. When you are listening to a friend or reading a book, do not assign great value to individual words or even to phrases. Forget separate thoughts, and give no great consideration even to logically arranged ideas. Remember that though your friend

desires it, he cannot express himself save by ready-made forms of speech. Look well to the expression of his face, listen to the intonation of his voice—this will help you to penetrate through his words to his soul. Not only in conversation, but even in a written book, can one overhear the sound, even the timbre of the author's voice, and notice the finest shades of expression in his eyes and face. Do not fasten upon contradictions, do not dispute, do not demand argument: only listen with attention. In return for which, when you begin to speak, you also will have to face no dispute, nor to produce arguments, which you know well you neither have nor could have. So you will not be annoyed by having pointed out to you your contradictions which you know well were always there, and will always be there, and with which it is painful, nay quite impossible, for you to part. Then, then—and this is most important of all—you will at last be convinced that truth does not depend on logic, that there are no logical truths at all, that you therefore have the right to search for what you like, how you like, without argument, and that if something results from your search, it will not be a formula, not a law, not a principle, not even an idea! Only think: while the object of search is 'truth,' as it is understood nowadays, one must be prepared for anything. For instance, the materialists will be right, and matter and energy are the basis of the world. It does not matter that

we can immediately confound the materialists with their conclusions. The history of thought can show many cases of the complete rehabilitation of opinions that have been cast off and reviled. Yesterday's error may be to-morrow's truth, even a self-evident truth. And apart from its content, wherein is materialism bad? It is a harmonious, consistent, and well-sustained system. I have already pointed out that the materialistic conception of the world is just as capable of enchanting men as any other—pantheistic or idealistic. And since we have come so far, I confess that in my opinion no ideas at all are bad in themselves: so far I have been able to follow with pleasure the development of the idea of progress to the accompaniment of factories, railways, and aeroplanes. Still, it seems to me childish to hope that all these trivialities—I mean the ideas—will become the object of man's serious seeking. If that desperate struggle of man with God and the world were possible, of which legend and history tell—think of Prometheus alone—then it was not for truth and not for the idea. Man desires to be strong and rich and free, the wretched, insignificant creature of dust, whom the first chance shock crushes like a worm before one's eyes,—and if he speaks of ideas it is only because he despairs of success in his proper search. He feels that he is a worm, he fears that he must again return to the dust which he is, and he lies, pretending that his misery is not terrible to him,

if only he knew the truth. Forgive him his lie, for he speaks it only with his lips. Let him say what he will, how he will; so long as we hear in his words the familiar note of the call to battle, and the fire of desperate inexorable resolution burns in his eyes, we will understand him. We are used to decipher hieroglyphs. But if he, like the Germans of to-day, accepts truth and the norm as the final goal of human aspiration, we shall also know with whom we have to deal, were he by destiny endowed with the eloquence of Cicero. Better utter loneliness than communion with such a man. Yet such communion does not exclude utter loneliness; perhaps it even assists the hard achievement.

XI

I and Thou

The familiar expression, 'to look into another's soul,' which by force of habit at first sight seems extremely intelligible, on closer observation appears so unintelligible that one is forced to ask whether it has any meaning at all. Try to bend, mentally, over another's soul: you will see nothing but a vast, empty, black abyss, and you will only be seized with giddiness for your pains. Thus, properly speaking, the expression 'to look into another's soul' is only an abortive metaphor. All that we can do is to argue from the outward data to the inward feelings. From

tears we deduce pain, from pallor, fear, from a smile, joy. But is this to look into another's soul? It is only to give room to a series of purely logical processes in one's head. The other's soul remains as invisible as before; we only guess at it, perhaps rightly, perhaps mistakenly. Naturally this conclusion irritates us. What a miserable world it is where it is quite impossible to see the very thing that we desire above all to see. But irritation is almost the normal spiritual state of a man who thinks and seeks. Whenever it is particularly important to him to be sure of something, after a number of desperate attempts he is convinced that his curiosity cannot be satisfied. And now the mocking mind adds a new question to the old: Why look for another's soul when you have not seen your own? And is there a soul? Many have believed and still do believe that there is no soul at all, but only a science of it, called psychology. It is known that psychology says nothing of the soul, considering that its task is confined to the study of spiritual states—states, by the way, which have as yet hardly been studied at all. . . . What is the way out? One can answer irony with irony, or even with abuse. One can deny psychology the right to be called a science and call the materialists a pack of fools, as is often done. Incontestably, anger has its rights. But this has sense and meaning only while you are among people and are listened to. Nobody wants to be indignant alone with one-

self, when one is not even reckoning upon making use of one's indignation for literary purposes: for even a writer is not always writing, and is more often preoccupied with transitory thoughts than with his forthcoming works. One prefers to approach the enchanted cave, though for the thousandth time, with every possible precaution. Perhaps it is only upon the approach of an outside soul that another's soul becomes invisible, and if she be caught unawares she will not have time to disappear. So that ponderous psychology, which like any other science always proclaims its plans and methods aloud before undertaking anything, is utterly unsuited to the capture of a thing so light and mobile as the human soul. But let us leave psychology with the honourable name of science; let us even respect the materialists, while we endeavour to track down the soul by other means. Perhaps in the depth of the dark abyss of which we spoke, something might be found, were it not for the giddiness. Therefore it is not so necessary to invent new methods as to learn to look fearlessly into the depths, which always appear unfathomable to the unaccustomed eye.

After all, unfathomability is not so entirely useless to man. It was driven into our heads as children that the human mind could compass only those things which are limited. But this only proves that we have yet another prejudice to get rid of. If it comes to giving up the right of abusing the materialists and of being taught by

psychology, and something else into the bargain —well, we are used to that. But in return we may at last be granted a glimpse of the mysterious 'thou,' and perhaps the 'I' will cease to be problematical as well. Patience is a sickening thing; but remember the fakirs and the other worthies of the same kind. They succeed by patience alone. And apparently they arrive at something; but not at universal truths, I am ready to vouch for that. The world has long been weary of universal truths. Even 'truth' pure and simple makes no whisper in my ear. We must find a way of escape from the power of every kind of truth. This victory the fakirs tried to win. They can produce no arguments to prove their right, for the visible victory was never on their side. One conquers by bayonets, big guns, microscopes and logical arguments. Microscopes and logic give the palm to limitation. And yet, though limitation often strengthens, it also happens that it kills.

THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

The Theory of Knowledge as Apologetics

THE modern theory of knowledge, though it always consciously takes its rise from Kant, has in one respect quite disregarded the master's commandment. It is very strange that the theorists of knowledge, who usually cannot agree among themselves upon anything, have as it were agreed to understand the problem of knowledge quite otherwise than Kant. Kant undertook to investigate our cognitive faculties in order to establish foundations, in virtue of which certain existing sciences could be accepted, and others rejected. One may say that the second purpose was chief. Hume's scepticism made him uneasy only in theory. He knew beforehand that whatever theory of knowledge he might invent, mathematics and the natural sciences would remain sciences and metaphysics be rejected. In other words, his aim was not to justify science but to explain the possibility of its existence; and he started from the point of view that no one can seriously doubt the truths of mathematics and natural science. But now the position is different. The theorists of knowledge direct all their efforts towards *justifying* scien-

tific knowledge. Why? Does scientific knowledge really need justification? Of course there are cranks, sometimes even cranks of genius, like our own Tolstoi, who attack science; but their attacks offend no one, nor do they cause alarm.

Scientists continue their researches as before; the universities flourish; discovery follows discovery. And the theorists of knowledge themselves do not spend sleepless nights in the endeavour to find new justifications for science. Yet, I repeat, though they can come to an understanding about practically nothing else, they amaze us by their unanimity upon this point—they are all convinced that it is their duty to justify science and exalt her. So that the modern theory of knowledge is no longer a science, but an apology. And its demonstrations are like those of apology. Once science must be defended, it is necessary to begin by praising her, that is by selecting evidence and data to show that science fulfils some mission or other, but indubitably a very high and important one, or, on the other hand, by painting a picture of the fate that would overtake mankind, if it was deprived of science. Thus the apologetic element has begun to play almost as large a part in the theory of knowledge as it has done hitherto in theology. Perhaps the time is at hand when scientific apologetics will be officially recognised as a philosophic discipline.

But, *qui s'excuse s'accuse.* It is plain that all is not well with science, since she has begun to

justify herself. Besides, apologetics are only apologetics, and sooner or later the theory of knowledge will be tired of psalms of praise, and will demand a more complex and responsible task, and a real labour. At present the theorists start with the assumption that scientific knowledge is perfect knowledge, and therefore the premisses upon which it is builded are not subject to criticism. The law of causation is not justified because it appears to be the expression of a real relation of things, nor even because we have data at our disposal which could convince us that it does not and will never admit exceptions, that uncaused effects are impossible. All these things are lacking; but, we are told, they are not needed.

The chief thing is that the causal law makes science possible, while to reject it means to reject science and knowledge generally, all anticipation, and even, as some few hold, reason itself. Clearly, if one has to choose between a slightly dubious admission on the one side and the prospect of chaos and insanity on the other, there will be no long hesitation. Apologetics, we see, has chosen the most powerful of arguments, *ad hominem*. But all such arguments partake of one common defect; they are not constant, and they are double-edged.

To-day they defend scientific knowledge; to-morrow they will attack it. Indeed, it so happens that the very belief in the causal law begets a great disquiet and turmoil in the soul, which finally produces all the horrors of chaos and

madness. The certainty that the existing order is immutable is for certain minds synonymous with the certainty that life is nonsensical and absurd. Probably the disciples of Christ had that feeling when the last words of their crucified Master reached them from the cross: 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' And the modern theorists may explain triumphantly that when the law became the instrument of chaos and madness, it was *ipso facto* abolished. 'Christ has risen,' say the disciples of Christ.

I have said that the theorists may triumph; but I must confess that I have not found in any of them an open glorification of such an obvious proof of the truth of their teaching. Of the resurrection of Christ they say not a word—on the contrary, they make every effort to avoid it and pass it by in silence. And this circumstance compels us to pause and think. A dilemma arises: if you grant that the law of causation suffers no exception, then your soul will be eternally haunted by the last words of the crucified Christ; if you do not, then you will have no science. Some assert that it is impossible to live without science, without knowledge, that such a life is horror and madness; others cannot be reconciled to the thought that the most perfect of men died the death of a murderer. What shall we do? Without which thing is it impossible for man to live? Without scientific knowledge, or without the conviction that truth and spiritual perfection are in the last resort the victors of this

world? And how will the theory of knowledge stand with regard to questions such as these?

Will it still continue its exercises in apologetics or will it at last understand that this is not its real problem, and that if it would preserve the right to be called philosophy, it will have not to justify and exalt the existing science, but to examine and direct some science of its own. It means above all to put the question: Is scientific knowledge really perfect, or is it perhaps imperfect, and should it therefore yield its present honourable place to another science? Evidently this is the most important question for the theory of knowledge, yet this question it never puts. It wants to exalt existing science. It has been, is now, and probably will long continue to be, apologetics.

Truth and Utility

Mill, seeking to prove that all our sciences, even the mathematical, have an empiric origin, brings forward the following consideration. If on every occasion that we had to take twice two things, some deity slipped one extra thing into our hands, we should be convinced that twice two is not four but five. And perhaps Mill is right: perhaps we should not divine what was the matter. We are much more concerned to discover what is practically necessary and directly useful to us than to search for truth. If a deity with each four things slipped a fifth into our

hands, we should accept the additional thing and consider it natural, intelligible, necessary, impossible to be otherwise. The very uniformity in the sequence of phenomena observed by the empirical philosophers was also slipped into our hands. By whom? When? Who dares to ask? Once the law is established no one is interested in anything any more. Now we can foretell the future, now we can use the thing slipped into our hands, and the rest—cometh of the evil one.

Philosophers and Teachers

Every one knows that Schopenhauer was for many years not only not recognised, but not even read. His books were used for waste-paper. It was only towards the end of his life that he had readers and admirers—and, of course, critics. For every admirer is at bottom a most merciless and importunate critic. He must understand everything, make everything agree, and of course the master must supply the necessary explanations. Schopenhauer, who did not have the experience of being a master till his old age, at first behaved very benevolently to his disciples' questions and patiently gave the explanations required. But the further one goes into the forest, the thicker are the trees. The most loyal perplexities of his pupils became more and more importunate, until at last the old man lost patience. 'I didn't undertake to explain all the

secrets of the universe to every one who wanted to know them,' he once exclaimed, when a certain pupil persisted in emphasising the contradictions he had noticed in Schopenhauer. And really—is a master obliged to explain everything ? In Schopenhauer's words we are given an answer, not ambiguous. A philosopher not only cannot be a teacher, he does not want to be one. There are teachers in schools, in universities : they teach arithmetic, grammar, logic, metaphysics. The philosopher has quite a different task, one which does not in the least resemble teaching.

Truth as a Social Substance

There are many ways, real and imaginary, of objectively verifying philosophic opinions. But they all reduce, we know, to trial by the law of contradiction. True, every one is aware that no single philosophic doctrine is able to support such a trial, so that, pending a better future, people consider it possible to display a certain tenderness in the examination. They are usually satisfied if they come to the conclusion that the philosopher made a genuine attempt to avoid contradictions. For instance, they forgive Spinoza his inconsistency because of his *amor intellectualis Dei* ; Kant, for his love of morality and his praise of disinterestedness ; Plato, for the originality and purity of his idealistic impulses ; and Aristotle, for the vast-

ness and universality of his knowledge. So that, strictly speaking, we must confess that we have no real objective method of verifying a philosophical truth, and when we criticise other people's systems, we judge arbitrarily after all. If a philosopher suits us for some reason, we do not trouble him with the law of contradiction; if he does not, we summon him before the court to be judged with the utmost rigour of the law, confident beforehand that he will be found guilty on every count. But sometimes there arises the desire to verify one's own philosophic convictions. To play the farce of objective verification with them, to look for contradictions in oneself—I do not suppose that even Germans are capable of that. And yet one desires to know whether he does indeed possess the truth or whether he has only a universal error in his hands. What is to be done? I think there is a way. He should think to himself that it is absolutely impossible for his truth to be binding upon anybody. If in spite of this he still refuses to renounce her, if the truth can suffer such an ordeal and yet remain the same to him as she was before, then it may be supposed that she is worth something. For often we appreciate conviction, not because it has an intrinsic value, but because it commands a high price in the market. Robinson Crusoe probably had a totally different way of thinking to that of a modern writer or professor, whose books are exposed to the appreciation of his numerous confrères, who can create

for him the renown of a wise man and a scholar, or utterly ruin his reputation. Even with the Greeks, whom we are accustomed to regard as model thinkers, opinions had—to use the language of economics—not so much a demand, as an exchange value.

The Greeks had no knowledge of the printing-press, and no literary reviews. They usually took their wisdom out into the market-place, and applied all their efforts to persuade people to acknowledge its value. And it is hard to maintain that wisdom, which is constantly being offered to people, should not adapt itself to people's tastes. It is truer to say that wisdom became accustomed to value itself to the exact degree to which it could count on people's appreciation. In other words, it appears that the value of wisdom, like that of all other commodities, not only with us, but with the Greeks before us, is a social affair. The most modern philosophy has given up concealing the fact. The teleology of the rationalists, who follow Fichte, as well as of the pragmatists who consider themselves the successors of Mill is openly based upon the social point of view, and speaks of collective creations. Truth which is not good for all, and always, in the home market and the foreign—is not truth. Perhaps its value is even defined by the quantity of labour spent upon it. Marx might triumph: under different flags his theory has found admission into every sphere of contemporary thought. There would hardly

be found one philosopher who would apply the method of verifying truth which I have proposed; and hardly a single modern idea which would stand the test.

Doctrines and Deductions

If you want to ruin a new idea—try to give it the widest possible publicity. Men will begin to reflect upon it, to try it by their daily needs, to interpret it, to make deductions from it, in a word to squeeze it into their own prepared logical apparatus; or, more likely, they will cover it up with the *débris* of their own habitual and intelligible ideas, and it will become as dead as everything that is begotten by logic. Perhaps this explains the tendency of philosophers to so clothe their thoughts that their form may hinder the approach of the general public to them. The majority of philosophic systems are chaotically and obscurely expounded, so that not every educated person can understand them. It is a pity to kill one's own child, and every one does his best to save it from premature death. The most dangerous enemies of an idea are 'deductions' from it, as though they followed of themselves. The idea does not presuppose them; they are usually pressed upon it. Indeed, people very often say: 'The idea is quite right, but it leads to conclusions which are not at all acceptable.' Again, how often has a philosopher to attend the sad spectacle of his pupil's desert-

ing all his ideas, and feeding only upon the conclusions from them. Every thinker who has had the misfortune to attract attention while he was yet alive, knows by bitter experience what ' deductions ' are. And yet you will rarely find a philosopher to offer open and courageous resistance to his continuators; and still more rarely a philosopher to say outright that his work needs no continuation, that it will not bear continuation, that it exists only in and for itself, that it is self-sufficient. If some one said this, how would he be answered ? People could not dispute with him—try to dispute with a man who wants neither to dispute nor to demonstrate.

The only answer is an appeal to the popular verdict, to lynch law. People are so weak and naïve that they will at all costs see a teacher (in the usual sense of the word) in every philosopher. In other words, they really want to throw upon him the responsibility for their actions, their present, their future, and their whole fate. Socrates was not executed for teaching, but because the Athenians thought he was dangerous to Athens. And in all ages men have approached truth with this criterion, as though they knew beforehand that truth must be of use and able to protect them. One of the greatest teachings, Christianity, was also persecuted because it seemed dangerous to the self-appointed guardians, or, if you will, because it was really very dangerous to Roman ideals. Of course, neither

Socrates' death nor the deaths of thousands of the early Christians saved the ancient culture and polity from decay: but no one has learned anything from the lesson. People think that these were all accidental mistakes, against which no one was secure in ancient times, but which will never again recur; and therefore they continue to make 'deductions' as they used from every truth, and to judge the truth by the deductions they have made. And they have their reward. Although there have been on earth many wise men who knew much that is infinitely more valuable than all the treasures for which men are ready even to sacrifice their lives, still wisdom is to us a book with seven seals, a hidden hoard upon which we cannot lay our hands. Many—the vast majority—are even seriously convinced that philosophy is a most tedious and painful occupation to which are doomed some miserable wretches who enjoy the odious privilege of being called philosophers. I believe that even professors of philosophy, the more clever of them, not seldom share this opinion and suppose that therein lies the ultimate secret of their science, revealed to the initiate alone. Fortunately, the position is otherwise. It may be that mankind is destined never to change in this respect, and a thousand years hence men will care much more about 'deductions,' theoretical and practical, from the truth than about truth itself; but real philosophers, men who know what they want and at what they aim, will hardly be em-

barrassed by this. They will utter their truths as before, without in the least considering what conclusions will be drawn from them by the lovers of logic.

Truths, Proven and Unproven

Whence did we get the habit of requiring proofs of each idea that is expressed? If we put aside the consideration, as having no real meaning in the present case, that men do often purposely deceive their neighbours for gain or other interests, then strictly speaking the necessity for proof is entirely removed. It is true that we can still deceive ourselves and fall into involuntary error. Sometimes we take a vision for a reality, and we wish to guard against that offensive mistake. But as soon as the possibility of *bona fide* error is removed, then we may relate simply without arguments, judgments, or references. If you please, believe; if you don't, don't. And there is one province, the very province which has always attracted to itself the most remarkable representatives of the human race, where proofs in the general acceptation are even quite impossible. We have been hitherto taught that that which cannot be proved, should not be spoken about. Still worse, we have so arranged our language that, strictly speaking, everything we say is expressed in the form of a judgment, that is, in a form which presupposes not merely the possibility but the neces-

sity of proofs. Perhaps this is the reason why metaphysics has been the object of incessant attack. Metaphysics evidently was not only unable to find a form of expression for her truths which would free her from the obligation of proof; she did not even want to. She considered herself the science *par excellence*, and therefore supposed that she had more largely and more strictly to prove the judgments which she took under her wing. She thought that if she were to neglect the duty of demonstration she would lose all her rights. And that, I imagine, was her fatal mistake. The correspondence of rights and duties is perhaps a cardinal truth (or a cardinal fiction) of the doctrine of law, but it has been introduced into the sphere of philosophy by a misunderstanding. Here, rather, the contrary principle is enthroned: rights are in inverse proportion to duties. And only there where all duties have ceased is the greatest and most sovereign right acquired—the right of communion with ultimate truths. Here we must not for one moment forget that ultimate truths have nothing in common with middle truths, the logical construction of which we have so diligently studied for the last two thousand years. The fundamental difference is that the ultimate truths are absolutely unintelligible. Unintelligible, I repeat, but not inaccessible. It is true that middle truths also are, strictly speaking, unintelligible. Who will assert that

he understands light, heat, pain, pride, joy, degradation ?

Nevertheless, our mind, in alliance with omnipotent habit, has, with the assistance of some strained interpretation, given to the combination of phenomena in the segment of universal life that is accessible to us, a certain kind of harmony and unity, and this from time immemorial has gained repute under the name of an intelligible explanation of the created world. But the known, which is the familiar, world is sufficiently unintelligible to make good faith require of us that we should accept unintelligibility as the fundamental predicate of being. It is impossible to hold, as some do, that the only reason why we do not understand the world is that something is hidden from us or that our mind is weak, so that if the Supreme Being wished to unveil the secret of creation to us, or if the human brain should so much develop in the next ten million years that he will excel us as far as we excel our official ancestor, the ape, then the world will be intelligible. No, no, no! By their very essence the operations which we perform upon reality to understand it are useful and necessary only so long as they do not pass a certain limit. It is possible to understand the arrangement of a locomotive. It is also legitimate to seek an explanation of an eclipse of the sun, or of an earthquake. But a moment comes—only we cannot define it exactly—when explanations lose all meaning and are good for nothing any

more. It is as though we were led by a rope—the law of sufficient reason—to a certain place and left there: 'Now go wherever you like.' And since we have grown so used to the rope in our lives, we begin to believe that it is part of the very essence of the world. One of the most remarkable thinkers, Spinoza, thought that God himself was bound by necessity.

Let any one probe himself carefully, and he will find that he is not merely unable to think but almost unable to live without the hypothesis of Spinoza. The work of Hume, who so brilliantly disputed the axiom of causal necessity, was only half done. He clearly showed that it is impossible to prove the existence of necessary connection. But it is also impossible to prove the contrary. In the result, everything remained as before: Kant, and all mankind after him, has returned to Spinoza's position. Freedom has been driven into an intellectual world, an unknown land,

> 'from whose bourne
> No traveller returns,'

and everything is in its former place. Philosophy wants to be a science at all costs. It is absolutely impossible for her to succeed in this; but the price she has paid for the right to be called a science, is not returned to her. She has waived the right of seeking that which she needed wherever she would, and she is deprived of the right for ever. But did she really need it?

If you glance at contemporary German philosophy you will say without hesitation that it was not needed at all. Neither by mistake, nor even in pursuit of a new title, did she renounce her great vocation: it has become an intolerable burden to her. However hard it may be to confess, it is nevertheless indubitable that the great secrets of the universe cannot be manifested with the clarity and distinctness with which the visible and tangible world is opened to us. Not only others—you will not even convince yourself of your truth with the obviousness with which you can convince all men without exception of scientific truths.

Revelations, if they do occur, are always revelations for an instant. Mahomet—Dostoevsky explains—could only stay in paradise a very short time, from half a second to five seconds, even if he succeeded in falling into it. And Dostoevsky himself entered paradise only for an instant. And here on earth, both of them lived for years, for tens of years, and there seemed to be no end to the hell of earthly existence. The hell was obvious, demonstrable; it could be fixed, exhibited, *ad oculos*. But how could paradise be proven? How could one fix, how express, those half-seconds of paradisic beatitude, which were from the outside manifested in ugly and horrible epileptic fits with convulsions, paroxysms, a foaming mouth, and sometimes an ill-omened sudden fall, with the spilling of blood? Again, believe, if you will: if

you won't, don't. Surely a man who lives now in paradise, now in hell sees life utterly differently from others. And he wants to think that he is right, that his experience is of great value, that life is not at all as it is described by men of different experience and more limited emotions. How desperately did Dostoevsky desire to persuade all men of his rightness, how stubbornly he used to demonstrate, and how angry he was made by the consciousness that lived in the depths of his soul that he was impotent to prove anything. But a fact remains a fact. Perhaps epileptics and madmen know things of which normal men have not even the remotest presentiment, but it is not vouchsafed to them to communicate their knowledge to others, or to prove it. And there is a universal knowledge which is the very object of philosophical seeking, with which one may commune, but which by its very essence cannot be communicated to all, that is, cannot be turned into verified and demonstrable universal truths. To renounce this knowledge in order that philosophy should have the right to be called a science! At times men acted thus. There were sober epochs when the pursuit of positive knowledge absorbed every one capable of intellectual labour. Or perhaps there were epochs in which men who sought something other than positive science were condemned to universal contempt, and passed unregarded: in such an epoch Plato would have found no sympathy, but would have died in

obscurity. One thing at least is clear. He whose chief interest and motive in life is in undemonstrable truths is doomed to complete or relative sterility in the sense in which the word is generally understood. If he is clever and gifted, men may perhaps be interested in his mind and talent, but they will pass his work with indifference, contempt, and even horror; and they will begin to warn the world against him.

> 'Look at him, my children,
> He is stern and pale and lean.
> He is poor and naked,
> And all men count him mean.'

Has not the work of the prophets who sought for ultimate truths been barren and useless? Did life hold them in any account? Life went its own way, and the voices of the prophets have been, are, and ever will be, voices in the wilderness. For that which they see and know, cannot be proved and is not capable of proof. Prophets have always been isolated, dissevered, separate, helpless men, locked up in their pride. Prophets are kings without an army. For all their love to their subjects, they can do nothing for them, for subjects respect only those kings who possess a formidable military power. And —long may it be so!

The Limits of Reality

After all, not even the most consistent and convinced realist represents life to himself as it

really is. He overlooks a great deal; and on the other hand he often sees something which has no existence in reality. I do not think there is any need to show this by example. For all our desire to be objective we are, after all, extremely subjective, and those things which Kant calls synthetic judgments *a priori*, by which our mind forms nature and dictates laws to her, do play a great and serious part in our lives. We create something like the veil of Maia: we are awake in sleep, and sleep in wakefulness, exactly as though some magic power had charmed us. And just as in sleep we feel for instants that what is happening to us is like a half-dream, an intermediate half-life. Schopenhauer and the Buddhists were right in asserting that it is equally wrong to say of the veil of Maia, the world accessible to us, either that it exists or does not exist. It is true that logic does not admit such judgments and persecutes them most implacably, for they violate its most fundamental laws. But it cannot be helped: when one has to choose between philosophy which is alluring and promising, and empty logic, one will always sacrifice the latter for the former. And philosophy without contradictory judgments would be either doomed to eternal silence, or would be churned into a mud of commonplace and reduced to nothing. Philosophers know that. The same is true of our own case: we must confess that we are at the same time awake and dreaming dreams, and at times we must own that though

we are alive, yet we have long since been dead. As living beings we still hold to the accepted synthetic judgments *a priori*, and as dead, we try to do without them, or to replace them by other judgments which have nothing in common with the former but are even opposite to them. Philosophy is occupied in this work with extreme diligence, and *in this and this alone* is the meaning of the idealistic movement which has never, since the time of Plato, disappeared from history. The problem is not for us to find another, primordial, better, and eternal world to replace the visible world accessible to all, as idealistic philosophy is usually interpreted by her official and, unfortunately, her most influential representatives. Interpretation of that kind too obviously bears the mark of its empiric utilitarian origin: they bring us as near to super-empiric reality as do the notions wherewith we define what is valuable in life. We might as well consider the super-empiric world as one of gold, diamond, or pearls simply because gold, diamonds, and pearls are very costly. But so it usually happens. God himself is usually represented as glimmering with gold and precious stones, as omniscient and omnipotent. He is called the King of Kings since on earth the lot of a crowned head is considered most enviable. The meaning and value of idealistic philosophy thus appears to be that she for ever ratifies all that we have found valuable on earth during our brief existence. Herein, I believe, is a fatal

error. Idealistic philosophy, it is true, gave an excuse for falsely interpreting her, since she loved to be arrayed in sumptuous apparel. The religion of almost all nations has always sought for forms outwardly beautiful without stopping even before such an obvious paradox—not to put it more strongly—as a golden cross studded with diamonds. And for the sake of sumptuous words and golden crosses men overlooked great truths, and perhaps great possibilities. The philosophy of the schools also loved to array herself, so that she should not be behind the masters in this respect, and for the sake of dress she often forgot her necessary work. Plato taught that our life was only a shadow of another reality. If this is true, and he discovered the truth, then surely our first task is to begin to live a different life, to turn our back to the wall above which the shadows are walking and to turn our face to the source of light which created the shadows or to those things of which the visible outlines give only a remote resemblance. We must be awakened, if only in part; to this end what is usually done to a person sound asleep must be done to us. He is pulled, pinched, beaten, tickled, and if all these things fail, still stronger and more heroic measures must be applied. At all events, it is out of the question to advise contemplation, which may well make one still sleepier, or quietude, which leads to the same result. Philosophy should live by sarcasm, irony, alarm, struggles, despairs, and allow

herself contemplation and quietude only from time to time, as a relaxation. Then perhaps she will succeed in creating, by the side of realistic dreams, dreams of a quite different order, and visibly demonstrate that the universally accepted dreams are not the only ones. 'What is the use?' I do not think this question need be answered. He who asks it, shows by the fact that he needs neither an answer nor philosophy, while he who needs them will not ask but will patiently await events: a temperature of 120°, an epileptic fit, or something of this kind, which facilitates the difficult task of seeking. . . .

The Given and the Possible

The law of causation as a principle of inquiry is an excellent thing: the existing sciences afford us convincing evidence of that. But as an idea in the Platonic sense it is of little value, at times at least. The strict harmony and order of the world have fascinated many people: such giants of thought as Spinoza and Goethe paused with reverent wonder in contemplation of the great and unchangeable order of nature. Therefore they exalted necessity even to the rank of a primordial, eternal, original principle. And we must confess that Goethe's and Spinoza's conception of the world lives so much in each one of us that in most cases we can love and respect the world only when our souls feel in it a symmetrical harmony. Harmony seems to us at once the

highest value and the ultimate truth. It gives to the soul great peace, a stable firmness, a trust in the Creator—the highest boons accessible to mortal men, as the philosophers teach. Nevertheless, there are other yearnings. Man's heart is suddenly possessed by a longing for the fantastic, the unforeseen, for that which cannot be foreseen. The beautiful world loves its beauty, peace of soul seems disgraceful, stability is felt as an intolerable burden. Just as a youth grown to manhood suddenly feels irritated by the bountiful tutelage of his parents, from which he has received so much, though he does not know what to do with his freedom, so is a man of insight ashamed of the happiness which is given to him, which some one has created. The law of causation, like the whole harmony of the world, seems to him a pleasant gift, facilitating life, but yet a degrading one. He has sold his birthright for peace, for undisturbed happiness—his great birthright of free creation. He does not understand how a giant like Goethe could have been seduced by the temptation of a pleasant life, he suspects the sincerity of Spinoza. There is something rotten in the state of Denmark. The apple of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, has become to him the sole purpose of life, even though the path to it should lie through extreme suffering.

And, strangely, nature herself seems to be preoccupied in urging man to that fatal path. There comes a time in our life when some impera-

tive and secret voice forbids us to rejoice at the beauty and grandeur of the world. The world allures us as before, but it no longer gives pure happiness. Remember Tchekhov. How he loved nature! What immeasurable yearning is audible in his wonderful descriptions of nature! Just as though each time that he glanced at the blue sky, the troubled sea or the green woods, a voice of authority whispered to him: 'All this is yours no longer. You may look at it, but you have no right to rejoice. Prepare yourself for another life, where nothing will be given, complete, prepared, where nothing will be created, where there will be illimitable creation alone. And everything which is in this world shall be given to destruction, to destruction and destruction, even this nature which you so passionately love, and which it is so hard and painful for you to renounce.' Everything drives us to the mysterious realm of the eternally fantastic, eternally chaotic, and—who knows?—it may be, the eternally beautiful. . . .

Experiment and Proof

When *cogito ergo sum* came into Descartes' head, he marked the day—November 10, 1619—as a remarkable day: 'The light of a wonderful discovery,' he wrote in his diary, 'flashed into my mind.' Schelling relates the same thing of himself: in the year 1801 he 'saw the light.' And to Nietzsche when he roamed the mountains

and the valleys of the Engadine there came a mighty change: he grasped the doctrine of eternal recurrence. One might name many philosophers, poets, artists, preachers, who like these three suddenly saw the light, and considered their vision the beginning of a new life. It is even probable that all men who have been destined to display to the world something perfectly new and original have without exception experienced that miracle of sudden metamorphosis. Nevertheless, though much is spoken of these miracles and often, in nearly all biographies of great men, we cannot strictly make any use of them. Descartes, Schelling, Nietzsche tell the story of their conversion; and with us, Tolstoi and Dostoevsky tell of theirs; in the less remote past, there are Mahomet and Paul the Apostle; in far antiquity the legend of Moses. But if I had chosen tenfold the number, if thousands even had been collected, it would still be impossible for the mind to make any deduction from them. In other words, all these cases have no value as scientific material, whereas one fossil skeleton or a unique case of an unknown rare disease is a precious windfall to the scientist. What is still more interesting, Descartes was so struck with his *cogito ergo sum*, Nietzsche with his eternal recurrence, Mahomet with his paradise, Paul the Apostle with his vision, while we remain more or less indifferent to anything they may relate of their experiences. Only the most sensitive among us have an ear

for stories of that kind, and even they are obliged to hide their impressions within them, for what can be done with them ?

It is even impossible to fix them as indubitable facts, for facts also require a verification and must be proved. There are no proofs. Philosophic and religious teachings offered by men who have had extraordinary inward experiences, not only do not generally confirm, but rather refute their own stories of revelation. For philosophic and religious teaching have always hitherto assigned themselves the task of attracting all and sundry to themselves, and in order to attain this end they had to have recourse to such methods as have effect with the ordinary man, who knows of nothing extraordinary—to proof, to the authority of visible and tangible phenomena, which can be measured, weighed and counted. In their pursuit of proofs, of persuasiveness and popularity, they had to sacrifice the important and essential, and expose for show that which is agreeable to reason—things already more or less known, and therefore of little interest and importance. In course of time, as experimental science, so-called, gained more and more power, the habit of hiding in oneself all that cannot be demonstrated *ad oculos*, has become more and more firmly rooted, until it is almost man's second nature. Nowadays we ' naturally ' share but a small part of an experience with our friends, so that if Mahomet and Paul lived in our time, it would not enter

their heads to tell their extraordinary stories. And for all his bravery, Nietzsche nevertheless passes quickly over eternal recurrence, and is much more occupied with preaching the morality of the Superman, which, though it at first astounded people, was after all accepted with more or less modification, because it was demonstrable. Evidently we are confronted with a great dilemma. If we continue to cultivate modern methodology, we run the risk of becoming so accustomed to it that we will lose not only the faculty of sharing all undemonstrable and exceptional experiences with others, but even of retaining them firmly in the memory. They will begin to be forgotten as dreams, they will even seem to be waking dreams. Thus we will cut ourselves off for ever from a vast realm of reality, whose meaning and value have by no means been divined or appreciated. In olden times men could add dreams and madmen's visions to reality; but we shall curtail the real indubitable reality, transferring it to the realm of hallucinations and dreams. I suppose even a modern man will feel some hesitation in coming over to the side of this methodology, even though he is incapable of thinking, with the ancients, that dreams are by no means worthless things. And if this is so, then the rights of experiences must not be defined by the degree of their demonstrability. However capricious our experiences may be, however little they agree with the rooted and predominant

conceptions of the necessary character of events in the inward and outward life—once they have taken place in the soul of man, they acquire, *ipso facto*, the lawful right of figuring side by side with facts which are most demonstrable and susceptible of control and verification, and even with a deliberate experiment.

It may be said that we would not then be protected against deliberate frauds. People who have never been in paradise will give themselves out for Mahomets. That is true; they will talk and they will lie. There will be no method of objective verification. But they will surely tell the truth also. For the sake of that truth we may make up our minds to swim through a whole ocean of lies. Yes, it is not in the least impossible to distinguish truth from lie in this realm, though, certainly, not by the signs which have been evolved by logic; and not even by signs, but by no signs at all. The signs of the beautiful have not yet been even approximately defined, and, please God—be it said without offence to the Germans—they never will be defined, but yet we distinguish between Apollo and Venus. So it is with truth: she too may be recognised. But what if a man cannot distinguish without signs, and, moreover, does not want to? . . . What is to be done with him? Really, I do not know; besides, I do not imagine that all men down to the last should act in unison. When did all men act in agreement? Men have mostly acted separately, meeting in

certain places, and parting in others. Long may it be so! Some will recognise and seek after truth by signs, others without signs, as they please, and yet others, in both ways.

The Seventh Day of Creation

Socrates said that he often used to hear from poets thoughts remarkable for their profundity and seriousness, but when he began to inquire of them more particularly, he became convinced that they themselves did not understand what they were saying. What did he really mean? Did Socrates wish to compare the poets to parrots or trained blackbirds who can learn by heart, with the assistance of a man to teach them, any ideas whatever, perfectly foreign to them. That can hardly be. Socrates hardly thought that what the poets say had been overheard by them from some one, and mechanically fixed in their mind, though it remained quite foreign to their soul. Most probably he used the word 'understand' in the sense that they could not demonstrate or explain the soundness and stability of their ideas,—they could not deduce them and relate them to a definite conception of the world. As every one knows, Socrates thought that not merely poets, but all men, from eminent statesmen down to ignorant artisans, had ideas, even a great many ideas, but they never could explain where they had got them, or make them agree among themselves.

In this respect poets were the same as the rest of people. From some mysterious source they had acquired truths, often great and profound, but they were unable to explain them. This seemed to Socrates a great misery, a real misfortune. I do not know how it happened—not a single historian of philosophy has explained it, and indeed very little interest has been taken in it—but Socrates for some reason decided that an unproven and unexplained truth had less value than a proven and explained one. In our times, when a whole theory, even a conception of the world, has been made of Socrates's idea, this notion seems so natural and self-evident that no one doubts it. But in antiquity the case was different. Strictly, Socrates thought that the poets had acquired their truths, which they were unable to prove, from a very respectable source, which deserved all possible confidence: he himself compared the poets with oracles, and consequently admitted that they had communion with the gods. There was, therefore, a most excellent guarantee that the poets were possessed of real, undiluted truth—the pledge of its purity being the divine authority. Socrates said that he himself had frequently been guided in his actions, not by considerations of reason, but by the voice of his mysterious 'demon.' That is, at times, he abstained from certain actions—his demon gave him never positive, but only negative advice—without being able to produce reasons, simply

because the secret voice, more authoritative than any human mind, demanded abstinence from them.

Is it not strange that under such circumstances, at an epoch when the gods vouchsafed truths to men, there should have suddenly appeared in a man the unexplained desire to acquire truths without the help of the gods, and in independence of them, by the dialectic method so beloved of the Greeks? It is doubtful which is more important for us, to acquire the truth or to acquire for one's self with one's own effort, it may be a false, but one's *own* judgment. The example of Socrates, who has been a pattern for all subsequent generations of thinking men, leaves not the slightest doubt. Men do not need a truth ready made; they turn away from the gods to devote themselves to independent creations. Practically the same story is told in the Bible. What indeed was lacking to Adam? He lived in paradise, in direct proximity to God, from whom he could learn anything he wanted. And yet it did not suit him. It was enough that the Serpent should make his perfidious proposal for the man to forget the wrath of God, and all the dangers which threatened him, and to pluck the apple from the forbidden tree. Then the truth, which until the creation of the world and man had been one, split and broke with a great, perhaps an infinitely great, number of most diverse truths, eternally being born, and eternally dying. This

was the seventh day of creation, unrecorded in history. Man became God's collaborator. He himself became a creator. Socrates renounced the divine truth and even spoke contemptuously of it, merely because it was not proven, that is, because it does not bear the marks of man's handiwork. Socrates really did not prove anything, but he was proving, creating, and in this he saw the meaning of his own life and of all human lives. Thus, surely, the pronouncement of the Delphic oracle seems true even now: Socrates was the wisest of men. And he who would be wise must, imitating Socrates, not be like him in anything. Thus did all great men, and all great philosophers.

What does the History of Philosophy teach us?

Neo-Kantianism is the prevalent school of modern philosophy. The literature about Kant has grown to unheard-of proportions. But if you attempt to analyse the colossal mass that has been written upon Kant, and put the question to yourself, what has really been left to us of Kant's teaching, then to your great amazement you will have to reply: Nothing at all. There is an extraordinary, incredibly famous name—Kant, and there is positively not a single Kantian thesis which in an uninterpreted form would have survived till our day. I say in an uninterpreted form, for interpretations resolve at bottom into arbitrary recastings, which often

have not even an outward resemblance to the original. These interpretations began while Kant was still alive. Fichte gave the first example. It is well known that Kant reacted, demanding that his teaching should be understood not in the spirit but in the letter. And Kant was, naturally, quite right. Of two things one: either you take his teaching as it is, or you invent your own. But the fate of all thinkers who have been destined to give their names to an epoch is similar: they have been interpreted, recast, till they are unrecognisable. For after a short time had elapsed, it became clear that their ideas were so overburdened with contradictions, that in the form in which they emerged from the hands of their creators, they are absolutely unacceptable. Indeed, all the critics who had not made up their minds beforehand to be orthodox Kantians, came to the conclusion that Kant had not proved a single one of his fundamental propositions. Something stronger may be said. By virtue of the fact that Kant, owing to the central position which he occupied, attracted much attention to himself and was forced to submit to very careful criticism, there gradually emerged a truth which might have been known beforehand: that Kant's teaching is a mass of contradictions. The sum-total of more than a century's study of Kant may be resumed in a few words. Although he was not afraid of the most crying contradictions, he did not have the smallest degree of success in proving

the correctness of his teaching. With an extraordinary power and depth of mind, with all the originality, boldness, and talent of his constructions, he really provided nothing that might be indisputably called a positive acquisition of philosophy. I repeat that I am not expressing my own opinion. I am only reckoning the sum-total of the opinions of the German critics of Kant, of those same critics who built him a monument *aere perennius*.

The same may be said of all the great representatives of philosophic thought beginning with Plato and Aristotle, and ending with Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Their works astonish by their power, depth, boldness, beauty and originality of thought. While you read them it seems that truth herself speaks with their lips. And what strong measures of precaution did they take to prevent themselves from being mistaken! They believed in nothing that men had grown accustomed to believe. They methodically doubted everything, re-examined everything, tens, hundreds of times. They gave their life to the truth not in words, but in deed. And still the sum-total is the same in their case as in Kant's: not one of them succeeded in inventing a system free from internal contradictions.

Aristotle was already criticising Plato, and the sceptics criticised both of them, and so on until in our day each new thinker struggles with his predecessors, refutes their contradictions

and errors, although he knows that he is doomed to the same fate. The historians of philosophy are at infinite pains to conceal the most glaring and noticeable trait of philosophic creation, which is, at bottom, no secret to any one. The uninitiated, and people generally who do not like thinking, and therefore wish to be contemptuous of philosophy, point to the lack of unity among philosophers as evidence that it is not worth while to study philosophy. But they are both wrong. The history of philosophy not only does not inspire us with the thought of the continual evolution of an idea, but palpably convinces us of the contrary, that among philosophers there is not, has not been, and will never be, any aspiration towards unity. Neither will they find in future a truth free from contradiction, for they do not seek the truth in the sense in which the word is understood by the people and by science; and, after all, contradictions do not frighten them, but rather attract. Schopenhauer begins his criticism of Kant's philosophy with the words of Voltaire: 'It is the privilege of genius to make great mistakes with impunity.' I believe that the secret of the philosophic genius lies here. He makes great, the greatest, mistakes, and with impunity. Moreover his mistakes are put to his credit, for the important matter is not his truths, or his judgments, but himself. When you hear from Plato that the life we see is only a shadow, when Spinoza, intoxicated by God, exalts the idea of necessity, when Kant declares that reason dic-

tates laws to Nature,—listening to them you do not examine whether their assertions are true or not, you agree with each of them, whatever he says, and only this question arises in your soul: 'Who is he that speaketh as one having authority?'

Later on, you will reject all their truths, with horror, perhaps with indignation and disgust, even with utter indifference. You will not consent to accept that our life is only a shadow of actual reality, you will revolt against Spinoza's God, who cannot love, yet demands love for himself, Kant's categorical imperative will seem to you a cold monster,—but you will never forget Plato, or Spinoza, or Kant, and will for ever keep your gratitude to them, who made you believe that authority is given to mortals. Then you will understand that there are no errors and no truths in philosophy; that errors and truths are only for him above whom is set a superior authority, a law, a standard. But philosophers themselves create laws and standards. This is what we are taught by the history of philosophy; this is what is most difficult for man to master and understand. I have already said that the historians of philosophy draw quite a different moral from the study of the great human creations.

Science and Metaphysics

In his autobiography Spencer confesses that he had really never read Kant. He had had

The Critique of Pure Reason in his hands, and had even read the beginning, the Transcendental Aesthetic, but the beginning convinced him it was no use for him to read further. Once a man had made the unconvincing admission which Kant had made, by accepting the subjectivity of one form of perception, of space and time, he could not be seriously taken into account. If he is consistent, all his philosophy will be a system of absurdity and nonsense; if he is inconsistent,—the less attention does he deserve.

Spencer confidently asserts that, once he could not accept Kant's fundamental proposition, he not only could not be a Kantian any more, but he found it useless even to become further acquainted with Kant's philosophy. That he did not become a Kantian is nothing to grieve over —there are Kantians enough without him—but that he did not acquaint himself with Kant's principal works, and above all with the whole school that rose out of Kant, may be sincerely regretted. Perhaps, as a new man, remote from Continental traditions, he would have made a curious discovery, and would have convinced himself that it was not at all necessary to accept the proposition of the subjectivity of space and time in order to become a Kantian. And perhaps with the frankness and simplicity peculiar to him, which is not afraid to be taken for naïveté, he would have told us that not a single Kantian (Schopenhauer excepted), not even

Kant himself, has ever seriously accepted the fundamental propositions of the Transcendental Aesthetic, and therefore has never made from them any conclusions or deductions whatever. On the contrary, the Transcendental Aesthetic was itself a deduction from another proposition, that we have synthetic judgments *a priori*. The original rôle of this, the most original of all theories ever invented, was to be a support and an explanation of the mathematical sciences. It had never had an independent, material content, susceptible of analysis and investigation. Space and time are the eternal forms of our perception of the world: to this, according to the strict meaning of Kant's teaching, nothing can be added, and nothing abated. Spencer, not having read the book to the end, imagined that Kant would begin to make deductions and became nervous. But if he had read the book to the end, he would have been convinced that Kant had not made any deductions, and that the whole meaning of *The Critique of Pure Reason* indeed is that from the propositions of the Transcendental Aesthetic no deductions can be made. It is now about a hundred and fifty years since *The Critique of Pure Reason* appeared. No philosophic work has been so much studied and criticised. And yet where are the Kantians who attempt to make deductions from the proposition as to the subjectivity of space and time? Schopenhauer is the only exception. He indeed took the Kantian idea seriously, but

it may be said without exaggeration that of all Kantians the least like Kant was Schopenhauer.

The world is a veil of Maia. Would Kant really have agreed to such an interpretation of his Transcendental Aesthetic? Or what would Kant have said, if he had heard that Schopenhauer, referring to the same Aesthetic in which he saw the greatest philosophic revelation, had admitted the possibility of clairvoyance and magic? Probably Spencer thought that Kant would himself make all these deductions, and therefore threw away the book which bound him to conclusions so absurd. It is a pity that Spencer was in such a hurry. Had he acquainted himself with Kant, he would have been convinced that the most absurd idea might serve a very useful purpose; and that there is not the least necessity to make from an idea all the deductions to which it may lead. A man is a free agent and he can deduce if he has a mind to; if he has not, he will not; and there is no necessity to judge the character of a philosophic theory by its general postulates. Even Schopenhauer did not exploit Kant's theory to the full, which, if it had really divined the truths hitherto hidden from men, would have not only put an end to metaphysical researches, but also have given an impulse and a justification to perfectly new experiments which from the previous standpoint were quite mad and unimaginable. For if space and time are forms of our human perception, then they do indeed hide the ultimate truth from

us. While men knew nothing of this, and, simple minded, accepted the visible reality for the actual real, they could not of course dream of true knowledge. But from the moment when the truth was revealed to them through Kant's penetration, it is clear that their true task was to use every possible means to free themselves from the harness and to break away from it, while consolidating all those judgments which Kant calls synthetic judgments *a priori* for all eternity.

And the new, the critical metaphysics, which should take account of the stupid situation in which these had hitherto found themselves who saw in apodeictic judgments eternal truths, had a great task to set herself: to get rid at all costs of apodeictic judgments, knowing them for false. In other words, Kant's task should not have been to minimise the destructive effect of Hume's scepticism, but to find a still more deadly explosive to destroy even those limits which Hume was obliged to preserve. It is surely evident that truth lies beyond synthetic judgments *a priori*, and that it cannot at all resemble an *a priori* judgment, and in fact cannot be like a judgment of any kind.

And it must be sought by methods quite different from those by which it has been sought hitherto. To some extent Kant attempted to describe how he represented to himself the meaning hidden beneath the words: 'Space and time are subjective forms of perception.' He even

gave an object-lesson, saying that perhaps there are beings who perceive the world otherwise than under the forms of space and time: which means that for such beings there is no change. All that we perceive by a succession of changes, they perceive at once. To them Julius Cæsar is still alive, though he is dead; to them the twenty-fifth century A.D., which none of us will live to see, and the twenty-fifth century B.C., which we reconstruct with such difficulty from the fragmentary traces of the past which have accidentally been preserved to us, the remote North Pole, and even the stars which we cannot see through the telescope—all are as accessible to them as to us the events which are taking place before our eyes. Nevertheless Kant, in spite of all temptation to acquire the knowledge to which such beings have access, notwithstanding his profound conviction of the truth of his discovery, did nothing to dispel the charm of forms of perception and categories of the reason, or to tear the blinkers from his eyes and see all the depth of the mysterious reality hitherto hidden from us. He does not even give a little circumstantial explanation why he considered such a task impracticable, and he confines himself to the dogmatic assertion that man cannot conceive a reality beyond space and time. Why? It is a question of immense importance. Compared with it all the problems of *The Critique of Pure Reason* are secondary. How is mathematics possible, how are natural sciences pos-

sible?—these are not even questions at all compared to the question whether it is possible to free ourselves from conventional human knowledge in order to attain the ultimate, all-embracing truth.

Herein the Kantians display an even greater indifference than Kant himself: they are even proud of their indifference, they plume themselves upon it as a high virtue. They assert that truth is not *beyond* synthetic judgments *a priori*, but indeed *in* them; and that it is not the Creator who put blinkers upon us, but we ourselves devised them, and that any attempt to remove them and look open-eyed upon the world is evidence of perversity. If the old Serpent appeared nowadays to seduce the modern Adam, he would retire discomfited. Even Eve herself would be no use to him. The twentieth-century Eve studies in a university and has quite sufficiently blunted her natural curiosity. She can talk excellently well of the teleological point of view and is quite as proof as man against temptation. I do not share Kant's confidence that space and time are forms of our perception, nor do I see a revelation in it. But if I had once accepted this apocalyptic assertion, and could think that there was some truth in it, I would not depart from it to positive science.

It is a pity that Spencer did not read *The Critique of Pure Reason* to the end. He would have convinced himself of an important truth: that a philosopher has no need to take into

consideration all the deductions from his premisses. He need only have goodwill, and he can draw from the most paradoxical and suspicious premisses conclusions which are fully conformable to common-sense and the rules of decency. And since Kant's will was as good as Spencer's, they would have agreed perfectly in their deductions, though they were so far apart from each other in their premisses.

A Tacit Assumption

Schopenhauer was the first philosopher to ask the value of life. And he gave a definite answer: in life there is much more suffering than joy, therefore life must be renounced. I must add that strictly speaking he asked not only the value of life, but also the value of joy and suffering. And to this question he gave an equally definite answer. According to his teaching joy is always negative, suffering always positive. Therefore by its essence joy cannot compensate for suffering.

In all this philosophical construction, both in formulating and answering the questions, there is one tacit, particularly curious, and interesting and unexpressed postulate. Schopenhauer starts from the assumption that his valuation of life, joy and suffering, in order to have the right to be called truth, must contain something universal, by virtue of which it will in the last resort coincide with the valuation of all other

people. Whence did he derive this idea? Psychologically the train of Schopenhauer's thought is intelligible and easily explained. He was used to the scientific formulation and solution of problems, and he transferred to the question which engaged him methods of investigation which by general consent usually conduct us to the truth. He did not verify his premiss *ad hoc*, and usually it is impossible to verify a premiss every time that a need arises for it. It is not even becoming to exhibit it, to speak of it. It is understood. If the fundamental sign of any truth is its being universal and obligatory, then in the given case the true answer to the question of the value of life can only be something which will be absolutely admissible by all men to all creatures with a mind. So Schopenhauer would probably have answered, if any one had questioned his right to formulate in such a general way the question of the value of life.

Still Schopenhauer would hardly be right. This, by the way, is being made clear by the objections which are put forward by his opponents. He is accused because his very statement of the question presupposes a subjective point of view—eudæmonism.

The question of the value of life, people object, is not at all decided by whether in the sum life gives more joy than pain or *vice versa*. Life may be deeply painful and devoid of joy, life may in itself be one compact horror, and

still be valuable. Schopenhauer's philosophy was not discussed in his lifetime, so that he could not answer his opponents. But, if he were still alive, would he accept these objections and renounce his pessimism? I am convinced that he would not. At the same time I am convinced that his opponents would be no less firm and would go on repeating: 'The question is not one of happiness or suffering. We value life by a quite different and independent standard.' And in the discussion it would perhaps become clear to the disputants that the premiss mentioned above, which both accepted as requiring no proof and understood without explanation, does indeed require proofs and explanations, but is provided with neither. To one man the eudæmonistic point of view is ultimate and decisive, to another contemptible and degrading, and he seeks the meaning of life in a higher, ethical or æsthetic purpose. There are also people who love sorrow and pain, and see in them the justification and the source of the depth and importance of life. Nor do I mention the fact that when the sum-totals of life are reckoned different accountants reach different and directly contradictory results, or that insoluble questions arise concerning these, or other details. Schopenhauer for instance finds, as we have seen, that sufferings are positive, joys negative. And hence he concludes that it is not worth while to submit to the least unpleasantness for the sake of the greatest joy.

What answer can be made? How can he be convinced of the contrary?

Nevertheless the fact is obvious: many people regard the matter in quite a different light. For the sake of a single happiness they are ready to endure a great many serious hardships. In a word, Schopenhauer's premiss is quite unjustified, and not only cannot be accepted as an indubitable truth, but must be qualified as an indubitable error. It is impossible to be certain beforehand that to the question of the value of life a single, universally valid answer can be given. So here we meet with an extraordinarily curious case from the point of view of the theory of knowledge. It appears that by the very essence of the matter no uniform answer can be given to one of the most important questions, perhaps the most important question of philosophy. If you are asked what is life, good or evil, you are obliged to say that life is both good and evil; or something independent of good and evil; or a mixture of good and evil in which there is more good than evil, or more evil than good.

And, I repeat, each of these answers, although they logically quite exclude each other, has the right to claim the title of *truth*; for if it has not power enough to make the other answers bow down before it, at all events it has the necessary strength to repel its opponents' attacks and to defend its sovereign rights. Instead of a sole and omnipotent truth before which the weak and

helpless errors tremble, you have before you a whole line of perfectly independent truths excellently armed and defended. Instead of absolutism, you have a feudal system. And the vassals are so firmly ensconced in their castles that an experienced eye can see at once that they are impregnable.

I took for my instance Schopenhauer's doctrine of the value of life. But many philosophic doctrines, although they issue from the premiss of one sovereign truth, display examples of the plurality of truths. It is usually believed that one should study the history of philosophy in order to be palpably convinced that mankind has gradually mastered its delusions and is now on the high road to ultimate truth. My opinion is that the history of philosophy must bring every impartial person, who is not infected by modern prejudices, to a directly opposite conclusion. There can be no doubt that a whole series of questions exists, like that of the value of life, which by their very essence do not admit of a uniform solution. To this testimony is often borne by men whose very last concern is to curtail the royal prerogative of sovereign truth: Natorp confidently asserts that Aristotle not only did not understand but could not understand Plato. 'Der tiefere Grund ist die ewige Unfähigkeit des Dogmatismus sich in der Gesichtspunkt der kritischen Philosophie überhaupt zu versetzen.' 'Eternal incapability'—what words! And used not of any common-

place person, but of the greatest human genius known to us, of Aristotle. Had Natorp been a little more inquisitive, 'eternal incapability' of that kind should have worried him at least as much as Plato's philosophy, on which he wrote a large book. For here is evidently a great riddle. Different people, according to the different constitution of their souls, are while yet in their mother's womb destined to have different philosophies. It reminds me of the famous Calvinistic view of predetermination. Just as from before birth God has destined some to damnation, others to salvation; so to some it is given and from others withheld, to know the truth.

And not Natorp alone argues thus. It would be true to say all modern philosophers, who are always contending with each other and suspecting each other of 'eternal incapability.' Philosophers have not the same means of compelling conviction as the representatives of other positive sciences: they cannot force every one to undeniable conclusions. Their *ultima ratio*, their personal opinion, their private conviction, their last refuge, is the 'eternal incapability' of their opponents to understand them. Here the tragic dilemma is clear to all. Of two things one: either renounce philosophy entirely, or allow that that which Natorp calls the 'eternal incapability' is not a vice or a weakness, but a great virtue and power hitherto unappreciated and misunderstood. Aristotle,

indeed, was organically incapable of understanding Plato, just as Plato could not have understood Aristotle, just as neither of them could understand the sceptics or the sophists, just as Leibnitz could not understand Spinoza, as Schopenhauer could not understand Hegel, and so on till our riotous modern days when no philosopher can understand any one except himself. Besides, philosophers do not aspire to mutual understanding and unity, but usually it is with the utmost reluctance that they observe in themselves similarity to their predecessors. When the similarity of Schopenhauer's teaching to that of Spinoza was pointed out to him, he said *Pereant qui ante nos nostra dixerint.* But representatives of the other positive sciences understand each other, rarely dispute, and never argue by referring to the ' eternal incapability ' of their confrères. Perhaps in philosophy this chaotic state of affairs and this unique argument are part of the craft. Perhaps in this realm it is necessary that Aristotle should not understand Plato and should not accept him, that the materialists should always be at war with the idealists, the sceptics with the dogmatists. In other words, the premiss with which Schopenhauer began the investigation into the value of life, and which as we have shown he took without verification from the representatives of positive science, though perfectly applicable in its proper sphere, is quite out of place in philosophy. And indeed, though they never

speak of it, philosophers value their own personal convictions much more highly than universally valid truth. The impossibility of discovering one sole philosophic truth may alarm any one but the philosophers themselves, who, so soon as they have worked out their own convictions, take not the smallest trouble to secure general recognition for them. They are only busy with getting rid of their vassal dependence and acquiring sovereign rights for themselves. The question whether there will be other sovereigns by their side hardly concerns them at all.

The history of philosophy should be so expounded that this tendency should be clearly manifest. This would spare us from many prejudices, and would clear the way for new and important inquiries. Kant, who shared the opinion that truth is the same for all, was convinced that metaphysics must be a science *a priori*, and since it cannot be a science *a priori*, must therefore cease to exist. If the history of philosophy had been expounded and understood differently in his day, it would never have entered his mind thus to impugn the rights of metaphysics. And probably he would not have been vexed by the contradictoriness or the lack of proof in the teachings of various schools of metaphysics. It cannot be otherwise, neither should it be. The interest of mankind is not to put an end to the variety of philosophic doctrines but to allow the perfectly natural phenomenon wide and deep development. Philosophers have

always had an instinctive longing for this: that is why they are so troublesome to the historian of philosophy.

The First and the Last

In the first volume of *Human, All too Human*, which Nietzsche wrote at the very beginning of his disease, when he was still far from final victory and chiefly told of his defeats, there is the following remarkable, though half-involuntary confession: 'The complete irresponsibility of Man for his actions and his being is the bitterest drop for the man of knowledge to drink, since he has been accustomed to see in responsibility and duty the very patent of his title to manhood.'

Much bitterness has the inquiring spirit to swallow, but the bitterest of all is in the knowledge that his moral qualities, his readiness to fulfil his duty ungrudgingly, gives him no preference over other men. He thought he was a man of noble rank, even a prince of the blood, crowned with a crown, and the other men boorish peasantry—but he is just the same, a peasant, the same as all the rest. His patent of nobility was that for which he fulfilled his most arduous duty and made sacrifices; in it he saw the meaning of life. And when it is suddenly revealed that there is no provision made for titles or patents, it is a horrible catastrophe, a cataclysm—and life loses all meaning. Evidently the conviction expressed with such moving

frankness in these words was with Nietzsche a second nature, which he could not master all his life long. What is the Superman but a title, a patent, giving the right to be called a noble among the *canaille*? What is the pathos of distance and all Nietzsche's teaching of ranks? The formula, beyond good and evil, was by no means so all-destructive as at first sight it seemed. On the contrary, by erasing certain laws graven on the tables of mankind of old, that formula as it were revealed other commandments, obliterated by time, and therefore invisible to many.

All morality, all good in and for itself is rejected, but the patent of nobility grows more precious until it becomes, if not the only value, at least the chief. Life loses its meaning once titles and ranks are destroyed, once he is deprived of the right to hold his head high, to throw out his chest, his belly even, and to look with contempt upon those about him.

In order to show to what extent the doctrine of rank has become attached to the human soul, I would recall the words of the Gospel about the first and last. Christ, who seemed to speak in a language utterly new, who taught men to despise earthly blessings—riches, fame, honours, who so easily yielded Cæsar his due, because he thought that only Cæsar would find it useful—Christ himself, when he spoke to men, did not think it possible to take away from them their hope of distinction. 'The first shall be last.'

What will there be first and second there, too? Yes, so it stands in the Gospel. Is it because there is indeed in the division of men into ranks something original and warrantable, or is it because Christ who spoke to humankind could not but use human words? It may be that, but for that promise, and generally the series of promises of rewards, accessible to the human understanding, the Gospel would not have fulfilled its great historic mission, it would have passed unnoticed on the earth, and no one would have detected or recognised in it the Evangel. Christ knew that men could renounce all things, save the right to superiority alone, to superiority over one's neighbours, to that which Nietzsche calls 'the patent of nobility.' Without that superiority men of a certain kind cannot live. They become what the Germans so appropriately call *Vögelfrei*, deprived of the protection of the laws, since the laws are the only source of *their* right. Rude, nonsensical, disgusting reality—against which, I repeat, their *only* defence is the patent of nobility, the unwritten charter—approaches them closer and closer, with more and more menace and importunacy, and claims its right. 'If you are the same as all other men,' it says, 'take your experience of life from me, fulfil your trivial obligations, worse than that, accept from me the fines and reprimands to which the rank and file are subject, even to corporal punishment.' How could he accept these degrading conditions who

had been used to think he had the right to carry his head high, to be proud and independent? Nietzsche tries with dull submissiveness to swallow the horrible bitterness of his confession, but courage and endurance, even *his* courage and endurance, are not enough for this his greatest and most terrible task. He cannot bear the horror of a life deprived of rights and defences: he seeks again for power and authority which would protect him and give him his lost rights again. He will not rest until he receives under another name a *restitutio in integrum* of all the rights which had previously been his.

And surely not Nietzsche alone acted thus. The whole history of ethics, the whole history of philosophy is to no small degree the incessant search for prerogative and privilege, patents and charters. The Christians—Tolstoi and Dostoevsky—do not in the least differ from the enemy of Christianity, Nietzsche. The humble Jew, Spinoza, and the meek pagan, Socrates, the idealist Plato, and the idealist Aristotle, the founders of the newest, noblest and loftiest systems, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, even Schopenhauer, the pessimist, all as one man seek a charter, a charter, a charter. Evidently life on earth without a charter becomes for the 'best' men a horrible nightmare and an intolerable torment. Even the founder of Christianity, who so easily renounced all privileges, considered it possible to preserve *this* privilege for his dis-

ciples, and perhaps—who knows?—for himself too.

Whereas if Nietzsche and those other philosophers had been able resolutely to renounce titles, ranks, and honours, which are distributed not only by morality, but by all the other Sanhedrim, real and imaginary, which are set over man; if they could have drunk this cup to the dregs, then they might have known, seen, and heard much that was suspected by none of them before. Long since men have known that the road to knowledge lies by way of a great renunciation. Neither righteousness nor genius gives a man privilege above others. He is deprived, for ever deprived, of the protection of earthly laws. There are no laws. To-day he is a king, to-morrow a slave; to-day God, to-morrow a worm; to-day first, to-morrow last. And the worm crushed by him to-day will be God, his god to-morrow. All the measures and balances by which men are distinguished one from another are defaced for ever, and there is no certainty that the place a man once occupied will still be his. And all philosophers have known this; Nietzsche, too, knew it, and by experience. He was the friend, the ally, and the collaborator of the great Wagner, the herald of a new era upon earth; and later, he grovelled in the dust, broken and crushed. And a second time this thing happened to him. When he had finished *Zarathustra*, he became insane, more exactly, he became half-idiot. It

is true he carried the secret of the second fall with him to the grave. Yet something has reached us, for all his sister's efforts to conceal from carnal eyes the change that had befallen him. And now we ask: Is the essence of life really in the rank, the charter, the patent of nobility? And can the words of Christ be understood in their literal sense? Are not all the Sanhedrim set over man, and as it were giving meaning to his life, mere fictions, useful and even necessary in certain moments of life, but pernicious and dangerous, to say no more, when the circumstances are changed? Does not life, the real and desirable life, which men have sought for thousands of years, begin there where there is neither first nor last, righteous or sinner, genius or incapable? Is not the pursuit of recognition, of superiority, of patents and charters, of rank, that which prevents man from seeing life with its hidden miracles? And must man really seek protection in the College of Heralds, or has he another power that time cannot destroy? One may be a good, able, learned, gifted man, even a man of genius, but to demand in return any privileges whatsoever, is to betray goodness and ability, and talent and genius, and the greatest hopes of mankind. The last on earth will nowhere be first. . . .

Printed by T. and A. Constable, Printers to His Majesty
at the Edinburgh University Press, Scotland